

COMMEMORATING COMMUNIST EAST GERMANY IN THE BERLIN REPUBLIC:
MODES OF REMEMBRANCE IN LITERATURE, FILM, AND MEMORIAL SITES

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This dissertation studies how the Berlin Republic commemorates Communist East Germany and investigates how this engagement is translated into cultural memory. I understand cultural memory as dynamic, multifaceted, and as a widely contestational interplay of past and present in socio-cultural contexts. The making of cultural memory involves various participants and allows us to examine the nexus between individual remembering and culturally mediated memory. Culturally mediated memory appears as a process of the representation and manifestation of the past in the present. By studying the *mediality* of ‘present pasts,’ we gain an understanding of *how* the past is remembered and *how* it is mediated via cultural objects in the present.

My dissertation analyzes two texts by East German writer Christa Wolf, the novella *Was bleibt* (1990) and the novel *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (2010), Andreas Kleinert’s film *Wege in die Nacht* (1999) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006), and two memorial sites, the former State Security prison *Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* and the largest GDR prison for women *Hoheneck*. The objects reveal that the ‘present past’ is not the alignment of *a* society with a certain narrative of historical time. The various modes that translate memory into cultural form constitute society and bring individuals

into communication *as* society. They show how society continually establishes itself as it redefines its relationship to the remembered past. The objects capture remembrance as an act of reinvestigating *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*, relationships to the past. Instead of recalling the past in order to turn the page on a troubled history and thus strive for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the objects make apparent how past experiences are continually renegotiated, transformed, and utilized in order to respond to present needs. This project understands remembering as a development. It describes remembering and acts of memorialization as *Vergesellschaftung*, sociality. Memory appears as the moment of sociality when remembering instantiates and results in a mutual relationship between individuals and social groups, in which remembering is performed. We see how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering and how remembering as experience in itself offers society an experience of itself.

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Rudern zwei ein Boot,

der eine kundig der Sterne, der andere kundig der Stürme,

wird der eine führen durch die Sterne, wird der andere führen durch die Stürme,

und am end ganz am Ende wird das Meer in der Erinnerung blau sein. (Reiner Kunze)

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful children, Magdalena and Jamie. You gave me the strength to finish this project. I am proud to be your mother, and I love you more than words can say.

Katrin Mascha, April 14, 2014

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Famously, Francis Fukuyama pronounced with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that history had come to an end. Of course, quite the opposite happened. Never did the question of history, historiography, and cultural-historical contemplations become immediately more pressing. This is particularly true for Germany. With the dissolution of the East German state (the GDR) into the Federal Republic of Germany (the Berlin Republic), the new state recognized alongside the history of the Third Reich a new totalitarian site in its historical landscape. The single-party East German communist state under the Socialist Unity Party (*SED*) was quickly declared Germany's second dictatorship. The communist past, which initially did not belong to the entire nation, became a *gesamtdeutsche Verantwortung* (all-German responsibility), a 'fraternal' heritage, which demanded a *gesamtdeutsche Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (all-German coming to terms with the past).

While all of Eastern Europe underwent fundamental transformations during this same period, in the history of post-communist European states, the full and thorough replacement of one state system by another is unique. The forming of a new German state, the Berlin Republic, brought about not only significant changes on the macro level of politics, economy, and society (for both German states). The rapid revision of the former East German state also resulted in a thoroughness with which the new Federal Republic approached the past of the defunct SED-state. Studies conducted by Nadya Nedelsky (2004) or James Mark (2010) suggest that other East European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania

show a high degree of divergence and discrepancy regarding the new regime's response to the predecessor regime. The process of lustration in the East German state, however, was more thoroughgoing and complete than anywhere else. East Germany's accession to the former Federal Republic made accessible a range of institutional, material, and human resources, which facilitated the intensive reappraisal of East German communism. Thus, the immediate post-wall era initiated a period of political, social, and cultural reorientation in which the Berlin Republic established frameworks for coming to terms with its second dictatorial regime. And this process placed the "coming to terms with the GDR past" as the vanguard of post-socialist lustration.

This era displayed a variety of commemorative strategies in order to respond to the challenges of reckoning with East German communism. Remembering and commemorating the East German past has become a significant undertaking to say the least. In the two decades since the fall of the wall, mnemonic expressions have bloomed in the cultural landscape of the Berlin Republic. Material productions such as monuments, memorials, museum exhibitions, literature, and film have given form to the remembrance of the communist East German past. The developing field of Memory Studies has emerged as a key discipline in which to study these disparate mnemonic articulations in material culture. In the face of GDR remembrance, Memory Studies asks an important question: how is the past remembered and how is memory translated into material culture?

My dissertation is an intervention in the developing field of Memory Studies. Over the past two decades, the importance of the field has been underscored by numerous scholarly contributions from various disciplines. Recent publications such as *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (2010), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (2010), *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011), as well as the launch of a new academic journal *Memory Studies* in 2008 attempt

to bring theoretical and methodological focus to the promising yet disperse discipline. The investigations of Memory Studies stand to make a significant and long-lasting contribution to the discipline of German Studies: Germany as the axis of much of the horror and turbulence of the twentieth century and German as a culture in the twenty-first century performed largely through various acts of memorialization.

My dissertation entitled *Commemorating Communist East Germany in the Berlin Republic: Modes of Remembrance in Literature, Film, and Memorial Sites* studies how the Berlin Republic commemorates the Communist East German past and investigates how this engagement becomes cultural memory. Studying individual acts of remembering as well as widespread collective performances of commemoration in post-wall Germany, my dissertation investigates the nexus between individual remembering and culturally mediated memories. The main purpose of this study is to examine and contrast constituting forces in the making of cultural memory. My dissertation seeks to develop an understanding of cultural memory as dynamic, multifaceted, and as a widely contestational interplay of past and present in socio-cultural contexts, which involves various participants in the making of cultural memory. I treat cultural memory as a key component in the process of individual and collective identity-formation via cultural engagements with the past in the present. I show that the ‘present past’ is not so much the alignment of *a* society with a certain narrative of historical time. Rather, memorializing the past constitutes society and brings individuals into communication *as* society. Studying various modes of remembrance in the Berlin Republic is thus at the heart of our understanding of how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering.

Contextualizing the remembrance of the GDR past in the field of Memory Studies gives this analysis a framework in which to investigate the past as a plurality of possible meanings

articulated individually and collectively. I do not treat the past as a monolithic given. Rather, I proceed from the basic insight that culturally mediated memory appears as a process of the continued reconstruction, representation, and manifestation of the past in the present. The remembered past is not conclusive but highly disputed and open-ended. Memory continually resurrects the past into the present, creating a ‘present past’ (see Huyssen’s *Present Pasts*). This notion of a ‘present past’ is made visible through various acts of memorialization. In addition to studying *what* is being remembered in the present, this project is especially concerned with *how* the past is remembered and *how* the reconstruction of the past is mediated via cultural objects in the present. The *mediality* of ‘present pasts’ refers specifically to the translation of individual memory into material cultural and thus into the realm of collective/culture memory. This project pinpoints how the mobilization of memory in a socio-cultural context achieves new ways of articulating temporal imaginings of the past, present, and the future.

This dissertation highlights the importance of memory in the process of negotiating views of the GDR past. My objects for analysis do not recall the past through memory in order to “overcome” or “master” a troubled history. These objects and the according debates that they have ignited in German society instead reveal that a remembering society continually establishes itself as it redefines a relationship to the past. Remembrance in cultural artifacts does not seek to rehearse the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or a mastering of the past, but instead challenges a society to reinvestigate what I call *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* (relationship to the past).

The term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been subject to critique in the past. Most famously, Theodor W. Adorno’s lecture from 1959 addressed the question “*Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?*” in the context of post-war West Germany and its legacy of the

Nazi past. Adorno identified psychological and, more importantly, socio-political reasons for West Germany's inability to "come to terms" with the Nazi past. The existence of a shameful past, he claimed, resulted in conscious acts of denial, disavowal, and the deflection of guilt, producing selective remembering in turn, or more precisely, the willful suppression of shameful memories. Evading critical self-reflection, West Germany willfully effaced painful memories in order to deflect guilt or responsibility. Such effacement of memory is not the function of an unconscious process, but a conscious intention that has allowed old fascist sentiments to persist. The continued existence of these conditions, Adorno argued, endangers West German society and its fragile democratic system. The conscious suppression of the past has become a burden in the present. For Adorno, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* describes best the desire to turn the page of one's past in order to break its spell.

While *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* distances the past from the remembering society, calling it overcome and thus forbidding its immediacy in the present, I understand *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* as a means to draw the past closer to the remembering society, not for the sake of yoking a society under a historical burden, but for the sake of utilizing the past to investigate the circumstances of the present moment. Describing the present past according to *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*, I examine how memory becomes a crucial catalyst for societal and cultural reorientations in the present, chart out paths into the future. *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* make apparent how memory and mnemonic practices are fundamental in gaining a deeper understanding of the very idea of remembering as the realization of (individual, collective, social, cultural) belonging in the present.

Societal and cultural reorientation in post-wall Germany was particularly intense, especially at the historical watershed of 1989. Various mnemonic cultural objects emerging in

this time period shaped this reorientation and drew on the need to reinvestigate the relationship to the past. My dissertation focuses on three different media in the transformation of individual to cultural memory: literature, film, and memorial sites. Each medium channels memory into different modes of remembrance. Modes of remembrance refers to how memory is mediated in the present via cultural artifacts and refers to a web of relationships between memory, the mediator or producer of cultural memory (the author, the filmmaker, or the various participants in memorial creation), the generic form of memory mediation (literature, film, and memorial sites), and the recipient (the readership, the audience, and the public at large). Extrapolating modes of remembrance allows us to study interpretative frameworks put forth by a mediator that grant memory meaning in the present. They help us to approach the debate about GDR remembrance in contemporary Germany. Modes of remembrance are analytical tools to make visible how individual memory takes form in material objects and describes how *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* emerge as cultural memory. A mode of remembrance bridges the conceptual gap between the generation of memories (within the individual), the place where memory becomes materialized (cultural artifacts), and the moment of memory as collective (society).

1.1 THE DISCIPLINE OF MEMORY STUDIES

While many scholars from various disciplines became interested in the intersection between memory and culture, most notably Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, Aby Warburg, and Walter Benjamin, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs provided a groundbreaking sociological approach to collective memory in the first half of the twentieth

century. It marked a shift in the understanding of individual and collective memory. Memory, which we possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists in constant interaction with other humans. When memory is considered in terms of cognitive processes, Halbwachs argued that it is only an individual who is capable of remembering. Individual memory is, however, always embedded in a socio-cultural context. Halbwachs does not restrict memory to individual thought, but locates it within the thought of a “corresponding group,” which Halbwachs understood as a small social unit, i.e. the family or the religious community. Accordingly, the concept of collective memory emerges if the cognitive process of individual remembering is transferred to the level of the collective through group belonging. Individual remembering and collective memory thus engage in a reciprocal relationship: individual remembering requires a collective and the collective, in turn, shapes and actualizes individual memory.

However, Halbwachs kept the concept of collective memory separate from the cultural sphere. He did not perceive memory vis-à-vis traditions, institutions, or material artifacts. In the 1980s, historian Jan Assmann and German sociologist Aleida Assmann first introduced the concept of “communicative memory” in order to highlight the connection between individual remembering and the cultural sphere. Memory, he concluded, exists in constant interaction not only with a corresponding group but also in exteriorized, objectified, and symbolized forms. The term “communicative memory” enables us to delineate the difference between Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory and the concept of cultural memory.

Communicative memory, they argue, lives in everyday interaction. It is non-institutional and not formalized or stabilized by any form of material symbolization (J. Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory” 111). Communicative memory is played out on the social level. Memory is, then, a matter of communication and social interaction (109). Both

collective memory and communicative memory are non-institutional forms of remembering. Although Jan Assmann is better known because his work has been translated, it is actually Aleida Assmann who developed the term cultural memory or *kulturelles Gedächtnis*. Cultural memory is a *form* of collective memory (see A. Assmann's *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*). It is played out on the cultural level. Cultural memory, Assmann argues, exists in disembodied forms and requires mnemonic institutions of preservation and re-embodiment. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored in symbolic form, such as museums, memorials sites, archives, literature, and other forms of media. Accordingly, cultural memory is an amalgam of choosing, forgetting, and processing what is recorded, stored, and considered meaningful:

Auf der...Ebene des kulturellen Gedächtnisses stehen die symbolischen Medien als Träger im Mittelpunkt, wobei es sich ebenfalls um eine kollektive symbolische Konstruktion handelt, die durch soziale Kommunikation in Bewegung gehalten wird und durch Wechselwirkung dreier Komponenten, die zusammenwirken müssen: einem Träger, einem Milieu und einer Stütze. (A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 32-33).

Here Assmann aligns herself with the earlier work of sociologist Georg Simmel, who understood society (*Gesellschaft*) not as an essential given, but as a dynamic or processual entity that emerges as sociality, *Vergesellschaftung*. While my conceptual understanding of cultural memory is in accordance with Assmann's, it is important to note that within the discipline of Memory Studies we see a variety of terms that address in their own way what Assmann has called here "milieu." Although not exactly interchangeable, in the work of Memory Studies there is slippage amongst them. We can, thus, speak of: a remembering "collective," a "community," a "society," a "culture," among others. In my dissertation, I am interested in exploring the dynamic and processual quality of memory and society.

Once memory had been conceptualized beyond the realm of the personal, the notion of cultural memory, as well as the discipline of Memory Studies, encountered critique. Scholars from various disciplines have taken issue with the transferal of psychological and cognitive processes in the making of memory beyond the individual/personal realm. They have argued that the concept of collective/cultural memory is a weak metaphor, unable to encompass the vastness and complexity of historical thought and contemplation (Bloch, Klein). Cultures make historical narratives, but they do not collectively ‘make’ memory.

While acknowledging the significance of Memory Studies for the revival of cultural history in the humanities and the social sciences, others have taken issue with the alleged lack of clear-cut conceptual and methodological underpinnings of the discipline (Kantsteiner, Confino, Winter). The reason for this critique stems mainly from the interdisciplinary nature of the field. The notion of cultural memory is multifarious and invokes intellectual pluralism, resulting in a broad field of study and including a wide range of objects. The investigation of the relationship between memory and culture involves fields as diverse as history, sociology, art, literary and media studies, philosophy, and psychology. As literary scholar Astrid Erll maintains in her introduction to the *Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, this makes for the field’s terminological richness, but also for its disjointedness. The wealth of concepts and methods with which the study of memory and culture can be approached intensifies the dialogue among disciplines, but likewise complicates the consolidation of Memory Studies into a coherent discipline (2).

The historical and political changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s has led to a renewed interest in the field of Memory Studies. This has resulted in a proliferation of public controversies over memory, on the one hand, and the growth of scholarly contributions, on the

other hand. Some critics have taken issue with the growing public and scholarly interest in memory. They argue that the so-called “memory-boom” of the past two decades has led to a “cultural obsession” with the past and has given rise to a “memory-industry” (Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* 26). The memory-industry involves mainstream media, distributing images of the past, and making memory virtually inescapable in everyday life (Rosenfeld, Berliner, Fabian). Others conclude that the proliferation of a “memory-industry” reduces the potential of cultural memory to a commodity. “Memory” has become a product and encourages consumerism more than historical understanding. If memory is mediated and continually mass-produced in the form of key chains and postcards, then it is no longer an articulation of a relationship between the present and the past but merely a material trend, emptied of genuine historical contemplation (Winter, Huyssen *Present Pasts*).

At the heart of the critique of Memory Studies is the constructed opposition between memory and history. Halbwachs considered history abstract, totalizing and “dead,” whereas memory is “meaningful” and “lived” (Erll 6). Most scholars in Memory Studies, however, do not conceive of their field as a replacement for history as a discipline. History and memory are complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past. Memory Studies, as Aleida Assmann points out, is concerned less with the events themselves than the experience and aftermath of the events in the lives of those who remember them and who face the problem of how to represent these events. History and memory intersect when we seek to answer questions, such as: What has happened in the past? How is the past experienced and remembered? What are modes of representing the past? How can the memory of a historic event be preserved in public commemoration and personal memory (“History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony” 263)?

The disputed opposition of memory *vs.* history, memory *and* history, memory *or* history, or memory *as* history made a shift towards a more interdisciplinary approach of studying our relationship to the past. The two fields, of course, remain separate disciplines, albeit interwoven and interdependent. The reason why the discipline of history in its endeavor to access and represent the past acknowledged Memory Studies as partner (and not so much as rival) is to be found not only in the growing complexity and controversy of how we approach the past (261). It is also the result of a self-critical assessment of the historical discipline. Historians have challenged their own field and came to understand history no longer as a maker of empirical truth with claims to objective and factual depictions of the past (Carr). Historians have acknowledged that writing about history involves a writing subject that is trapped within the rules of language. All historical writing thus employs a deep narrative structure of historical imagination (White).

Historian Dominick LaCapra offers an insightful critique of historical practices. By arguing that history, and, thus, the discipline thereof, is always in transit, he acknowledges its own historicity. LaCapra's notion of transition and transformation of historical understanding requires a "continual rethinking of what counts as history in the dual sense of historical processes and historiographical attempts to account for them" (1-2). Accordingly, one of the major tasks of the historical discipline is to recognize and think through "problems," notable with respect to experiences, identity, and normativity, that "bear on one's conception of the relation between the present and the past" (2). Thus, historicizing encompasses a subjective process of representation that is tied to evaluative and socio-political dimensions and, therefore, brings the discipline of history closer to the alleged other, that is Memory Studies.

1.2 HISTORY REVISITED IN POST-COMMUNIST GERMANY

The so-called memory-boom peaked in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the Eastern bloc resulted in a reexamination of the past and brought it to the attention of both scholars and the larger public. The reason is to be found in the historical events that led to the collapse of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe in 1989. These events changed the outlook of Western society at large and necessitated a process of historicizing the communist past. As historian Gavriel Rosenfeld argues, it was not only socialism that was seen as having ended but also all future-oriented or utopian projects for political change (135). The process of critical engagement with the past took place throughout Eastern Europe. The liberation from Soviet rule ignited a process of confronting previously unaddressed issues of the past.

The emerging self-critical view of the past was particularly visible in Germany. With the end of the East-West conflict, the general climate of calculating imperatives of *realpolitik* in Germany, which had encouraged self-justifying and triumphalist historical narratives, changed drastically. The recognition of East German Communism as a new totalitarian site in Germany's commemorative landscape initiated a self-critical view of past legacies, including the crimes of National Socialism. While some scholars have argued that the post-wall era reaffirmed the central status of National Socialism in Germany's memory culture (Meyer, Niven), the immediacy with which politicians, scholars, writers, filmmakers, artists, and the public responded to the communist East German past has confirmed the growing significance of GDR remembrance in post-wall Germany.

The various discourses that have defined the debate about the GDR past in contemporary Germany reveal, on the one hand, that commemorating past legacies is a democratic process,

involving complex interactions of various participants. On the other hand, these interactions testify to a fundamental lack of consensus about the GDR past, resulting in various debates at various levels about its commemorative place in Germany. As soon as the communist past was considered a *gesamtdeutsche Verantwortung* (all-German responsibility), the Berlin Republic displayed a vast variety of commemorative undertakings. The complex interactions in the process of coming to terms with the GDR past involved the German parliament, politicians of all colors, scholars, writers, filmmakers, artists, museum curators, journalists, educators, and ordinary citizens. The Berlin Republic has incorporated the GDR past into its own *Erinnerungskultur*, one of the largest, well funded, and most deliberated commemorative landscapes in Europe. The role of the state is not to be ignored in the making of *Erinnerungskultur*. The state's active governance of commemoration provides a framework for commemorative undertakings, but, as we will see in this dissertation, it is by no means the only determining force for the development of cultural memory.

1.3 THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL STATE

The federal government adopted powers to set the parameters for a “national memory.” In 1992, the government set up the first *Enquete-Kommission zur Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland* to undertake a complete examination of the SED-regime and close gaps in historical knowledge about the GDR. The commission's reports functioned like an official state position on the GDR past and the national past in general. Its primary goals were to improve the Bundestag's ability to address the legacy of the GDR past. It was an instrument for addressing the material and personal legacy of the past through political

means. The commission sought to develop policies for reckoning with the past (*Vergangenheitspolitik*). The notion of *Vergangenheitspolitik* was based on the hope that the commission's report would provide specific, practical goals in coming to terms with the SED-regime - a hope that was ultimately disappointed and necessitated a second *Enquete-Kommission* (Beattie, *Playing Politics with History* 34).

Such attempts to centralize commemoration and define a “national past” were not new in Germany. The newly awakened interest in national history and national memory reminded many of the 1970s, when the neo-conservative West German government had taken a significant role in establishing a historical narrative that claimed a rightfully proud national identity. With the onset of a neo-conservative and rational trajectory of political and historical thinking in the mid-1970s, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was understood literally as the “overcoming” or “leaving behind” of a shameful past. CDU Chancellor Helmut Kohl sought to cement the idea of “normalizing” the past in order to bring closure to the Nazi crimes and to craft a grand historical narrative, in which Germany could “recover” from its infamous history. The government sought to portray Germany as a nation with a “normal history” that had its “highs as well as lows” (Olick, “What does it mean to normalize the past?” 552). It goes without saying that this ahistorical, straightforward expression of a “normal past” did not work out nearly as well as envisioned. The neoconservative agenda that favored nationalistic revisionism and historical relativism was, of course, heatedly debated, culminating in the *Historikerstreit* of 1986.¹

The attempt to articulate a “national memory” in the immediate post-wall years, however, did not focus on “normalizing” the GDR past. Although the federal government of the Berlin

¹ The political and intellectual debate about the crimes by the Nazi regime and their comparability to crimes committed by other dictatorial regime, such as the Soviet Union, is known as the German *Historikerstreit*. The positions taken by conservatives favored a comparative approach, placing the Nazis past in a larger trajectory of totalitarianism. Left-leaning intellectuals, on the other hand, insisted on the singularity and unprecedented evilness of the fascist regime, rendering it and the German course of history (German *Sonderweg*) unique.

Republic was equally eager to establish a commemorative agenda and asserted its dominant role in achieving a consensus about the status of GDR history, the government established commemorative parameters, which emphasized the authoritarian nature of the GDR. The commemorative agenda sought to address “das Unrecht der SED-Diktatur, [um] das Gedenken an die Opfer des Kommunismus in Deutschland zu bewahren” (“Protokoll”).

The first parliamentary steps undertaken in the effort to establish what we might call “official memory” (Bodnar) or “state-mandated memory” (Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering”) focused on justice, truth, and reconciliation, rigidifying the notion of the SED-regime as Germany’s second dictatorship. Many scholars have juxtaposed these commemorative strategies of stressing the authoritarian nature of the SED-regime with earlier (former West German) attempts to come to terms with the Third Reich (Verheyen, Jesse, Wassermann, Peschel-Gutzeit). The emphasis placed almost exclusively on aspects of dictatorship, injustice, and persecution reminded many of the juridical actions undertaken by the allies after World War Two. But unlike the Nuremberg Trials and other instances of juridical prosecution in 1945, the legal action against former East German border guards, government ministers, and members of the SED *Politbüro* (politburo) came from *within* the post-wall state. These attempts aimed at the search for accountability of crimes committed by and in the name of the SED-regime.

Additionally, the German government adopted legislation, the so-called *Erste* and *Zweite SED-Unrechtsbereinigungsgesetz*, aiming at the compensation and rehabilitation of victims of communist injustice. Additionally, the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz* (Stasi files act) of 1991 made it possible to gain access to files generated by the infamous State Security apparatus of the former GDR. This law officially promised to bestow transparency and a sense of unrestricted engagement on the process of coming to terms with the SED-regime.

While these first parliamentary steps could be subsumed under the broad rubric “post-communist transitional justice” (Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering” 25), the government’s commissions of inquiry into the history of the GDR in the 1990s reveal a great deal about the GDR remembrance in government hands. In addition to the first *Enquete-Kommission* (1992-1994), which was concerned with the “Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland” (coming to terms with the history and consequences of the SED dictatorship in Germany), the government organized a second *Enquete-Kommission* (1995-1998). This commission was concerned with the “Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit” (overcoming the consequences of the SED dictatorship in the process of German unity). Its major task was to contemplate the future of GDR remembrance in united Germany. The commission was given the task to produce guidelines for a Federal Memorial Concept (*Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes*, hereafter *Gedenkstättenkonzeption*). Promulgated for the first time in 1993 and revised in 2008, this concept placed emphasis on key sites of national and historical significance and aimed at establishing the primary focus of national commemoration. The *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* reveals two important insights: first, the federal government considered memorial creation a key factor in coming to terms with the GDR, setting funding priorities for sites of historical significance. Second, these sites represented the GDR in its dictatorial nature only, allowing for a greater understanding of the oppressive nature of the SED-regime.

The *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* has been cause for controversy. The memorial sites, which were added to the commemorative agenda after unification, were places of former political terror and state persecution, not only during communist socialism in the former GDR (and to a lesser extend the Soviet occupation period), but also during the Nazi dictatorship (i.e. the Buchenwald

Memorial in Weimar, the Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen in Brandenburg, the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen memorial, the Torgau Documentation and Information Center in provincial Saxony, the Bautzen Memorial in Dresden). The legacy of both National Socialism and East German Communism was inscribed in each of these historically charged places. After reunification, these sites emerged as representing a “double history,” further complicating the organization of a multidirectional historical complexity in a single commemorative space. Since spatial concentration of historical narratives rendered the commemorative practice vulnerable to reductionism, particularism, or universalism, critics took issue with the conflation of the two German dictatorships, equating them under the broad rubric of totalitarianism. While some acknowledged that the two regimes bear similarities in their totalitarian structures as dictatorial regimes, i.e. dictatorial party, emphasis on a certain ideology, economical control and planning, the use of terror and secret police (Friedrich, Stein, Beattie *Playing Politics with History*), the major critique came from the left leaning part of the government and liberal scholars. They insisted on the priority of remembering the uniqueness of Nazi terror and suggested to commemorate the GDR in its relative normality under SED-rule (Clarke, “Remembering the German Democratic Republic” 9). This, of course, led to the fear that de-emphasizing the dictatorial nature of the SED-regime would weaken the commemorative potential of the GDR past to educate the public about state oppression, persecution, and the abuse of power. The emphasis on everyday-life in the former GDR would likewise downplay the importance of resistance in the GDR, which prompted democratic change, resulting (among other factors) in the collapse of the SED-regime.

The *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* reflected these controversial views and suggested a compromise. On the one hand, the document stresses the inevitability of differentiating between

the two dictatorships, emphasizing the incomparability and singularity of the Nazi-crimes. The commemoration of the GDR past, on the other hand, is considered equally important, acknowledging the distinctiveness of German communist rule. The commemoration of both pasts aims at coming to terms with a *Diktaturvergangenheit* in Germany. The official statement thus reads: “Jede Erinnerung an die Diktaturvergangenheit in Deutschland hat davon auszugehen, dass weder die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen relativiert werden dürfen noch das von der SED-Diktatur verübte Unrecht bagatellisiert werden darf” (*Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes* 2). In order to get the commemoration of Germany’s *Diktaturvergangenheit* under way, the parliament passed a law in 1998 that founded the *Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship). It provided an official platform under public law for nationwide engagement with the separation of the two German states, the Cold War era, and - as the official statement of the foundation reads - the legacies of communist tyranny.

In 2005, we witnessed a shift from a central role for the state to less direct political oversight of state-mandated memory (Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering” 30). In order to find consensus in the ongoing debate about what shape the GDR remembrance should take in the future, the government appointed another commission, chaired by historian Martin Sabrow in 2005. The commission consisted of independent experts. The commission suggested placing more emphasis on the connection between SED-dictatorship and its societal repercussions in everyday-life (*Alltag*) in order to account for a range of perspectives on the GDR past.

Alltag played an important role in the commission’s contemplations. They felt that the prevailing notion of *Diktaturvergangenheit* could not sufficiently explain the growing interest and even celebration of *Alltag* in the former GDR. The nostalgia for the East, which indicated a

mournful view of the past by ignoring the oppressive aspects of life in the former GDR and celebrating GDR pop culture, is known as *Ostalgie*. The *Ostalgie* wave reached a peak in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Films, books, museums, the music industry, and retail businesses in general catered to the longing of former GDR citizens (and West Germans, chasing a pop cultural trend) for their former life in the GDR. While many were alarmed by this trend (Arnold-de Simine, Banchelli, Deutz-Schroeder, Berdahl and Bunzl, Saunders and Pinfold, Cooke *Representing East Germany*), the “Sabrow commission” considered *Ostalgie* an indicator for the necessity to reconceptualize GDR remembrance. Instead of delegitimizing romantic memories of the GDR and stressing the oppressive nature of the SED-regime even more, the commission advocated for the inclusion of *Alltag* and positive aspects of GDR life in the commemorative agenda. While the main goal formulated by the commission envisioned GDR remembrance as battling revisionist tendencies, the report also acknowledged the valid positive memories of *Alltag* in the former GDR, despite or in addition to experiences made under the SED-dictatorship. The commission hoped to bring critical remembrance to fruition by embracing complex and divergent views of the GDR past. Addressing and combining “rule / society / resistance,” the commission sought to explain the stability and longevity of the GDR state (Sabrow, “Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung?” 21-35).

While the Bundestag Committee for Culture and Media initially endorsed the commission’s recommendations, the Bundestag election in autumn of 2005 and the forming of a grand coalition changed the focus of GDR remembrance once again. The newly appointed commissioner for Cultural and Media Affairs was the conservative Christian-Democrat Bernd Neumann. Neumann brought back a radical view of the GDR past, battling nostalgia and positive memories of the GDR. As commissioner, he felt that the emphasis of GDR remembrance in the

Berlin Republic should be on the pervasiveness of dictatorship (Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering” 32-33).

1.4 MEMORY STUDIES AND THE GDR PAST IN CULTURAL OBJECTS

Martin Sabrow, chair of the commission in 2005, concluded four years after the commission’s work that united Germany was still far from establishing a clear and widely accepted consensus on the meaning of the GDR, its place in national history, and its role in charting out a national identity (“Die DDR erinnern” 16). Comments like these reveal the general belief that memory could somehow be commissioned and that a selected group of experts, entrusted to bestow conclusive meaning on the past, could generate a consensus.

In the effort definitively to ascribe meaning to the GDR past, many have accused the state, with its dominant role in centralizing GDR remembrance, of installing a monolithic national memory (Markovits, Hammerstein et al., Wielenga, Pohlmann). Rather than investigating the commemorative framework that the state had tried to establish in the first fifteen years after the fall of the wall and that had triggered various responses expressed in different cultural spheres, critics approached the debate by sharply distinguishing between official or state-mandated memory and non-official or bottom-up (alternative or counter-) memories, often favoring the latter over the former.² Ignoring the interdependence of the two and turning a blind eye to the pluralistic fashion in which the state has approached the GDR past, this critique reveals that commemoration is often evaluated in terms of ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ ‘right’ and

² The role of the state as important provider for (institutional, material, and funding) resources has only been marginally acknowledged in this discussion.

‘wrong.’³ In other words, these critiques assumed the role of judges in assessing commemorative articulations according to their degree of artificiality (memories imposed from above) and authenticity (memories expressed in bottom-up initiatives by grassroots organizations, activist groups, and victims). This approach suggested that remembrance would somehow be ‘truer’ and more meaningful, the more immediate the relationship is between the carriers of memory and the past that is remembered. It furthermore implied that there would be a “correct” way to remember that past, which could bring closure to the legacy of the past and consider it “*bewältigt*.”

The urge to assign conclusive meaning to the GDR past overlooks that the past is neither an unchanging entity, nor assumes conclusive meaning once it is articulated as “official memory” via state institutions or as “counter-memory” through non-official voices. While it is true that representations of the past derive from and are often used to explain relationships of a political nature, memory can neither be reduced to the politics of the state, nor can it be understood as completely detached from institutional influences. If we examine the means by which different actors engage in and exert influence in the making of cultural memories, we will be able to study memory in its social dimension, including the effects it has on political, social, and cultural organizations, and in turn, how these organizations shape memory. This project understands remembering as a development and process.

As an intervention in the field of Memory Studies, my dissertation is thus not content to fit various representations of the past into moralized compartments of ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ Rather, I studies what meaning the past assumes when it is negotiated in different artifacts and how

³ Andrew Beattie has successfully shown that since the early 1990s, the German state has never claimed a monopoly on GDR memory work. It has instead approached GDR commemoration in a relatively modest, inclusive, pluralistic, representative, and less dogmatic fashion. In the attempt to engage with and respond to popular memories and concerns, the state has consistently encouraged others to engage in this task and has promoted and generously funded civil society activity (“The Politics of Remembering” 21-34).

remembering comments on and constitutes the constellations of political, social, and cultural relationships to the past. I argue that remembering is contingent, changing, contested, and multifaceted. In literature, film, and in memorial creation we see memory as a dynamic force in forming and renegotiating relationships to the past in the present. Through different modes of remembrance we see how *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* arise and how they change, depending on present needs and according to the medium in which *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* will be traced. Scrutinizing the role of literature, film, and memorial creation in articulating and reflecting on *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* allows for a greater sensibility to observe and describe how a society experiences itself as a remembering collective and how remembering - expressed and shaped via cultural objects - constitutes a society.

The notion of a German *Erinnerungskultur* thus emerges as a realm of mediated relationships between the past and those who perform acts of remembering in the present. Analyzing the dynamics with which *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* come to define an *Erinnerungskultur* in the Berlin Republic, the remembered past is not the alignment of a society with a specific narrative of historical time. The act of remembering in the present constitutes society and brings individuals into communication *as* society. If we understand how remembering is performed in various cultural forms and how *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* are articulated, we can gain insight into how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering. It is my goal to make the discussion of GDR remembrance in literature, film, and memorial sites relevant to a more general understanding of the dynamic aspects of memory in order to highlight the discursive nature of historical thinking in the present.

1.5 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

My first chapter is devoted to literary practices of commemoration. When literature is considered in light of cultural memory, it appears as *the* mnemonic mode par excellence (Lachmann 301). Literary representations of the past allow for the investigation of the workings of memory on an individual level. The individual/writer/narrator appears as memory bearer and enters into a reciprocal relationship with the socio-cultural context in which shared notions of the past are negotiated, actualized, and maintained. Through literature and the act of writing, memories become communicable, not only to the self, and but also to others making memories part of collective/cultural contemplation.

This chapter examines the nexus between individual and collective remembering in two works of the East German writer Christa Wolf: the novella *Was bleibt* (What Remains, 1990) and the novel *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (City of Angels or The Overcoat of Dr. Freud, 2010). The texts are important literary contributions to the remembrance of the GDR past and the investigation of how *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* arise in literature. Wolf's texts reveal memory's disseminating force for continual self-renewal (of an individual and collective alike) through writing. Her literary contribution to the commemoration of the GDR scrutinizes the role of the individual (the writer, the narrator) in making memories accessible, communicable, and meaningful in the present. Wolf's texts suggest that remembering is elicited by occasion and is, thus, selective by necessity. This offers critical insight into the processes of remembering and forgetting alike, highlighting the interdependency of the two. The mode of remembrance in both *Was bleibt* and *Stadt der Engel* thus appears as *mnemonic self-exploration* through the act of writing. Framing the question of how we remember and what makes us forget are the central aspect of these texts, Wolf presents literary responses to current

individual, collective, and cultural needs. Remembering and forgetting appear as intrinsically interwoven with and contingent upon the reestablishing of individual and collective relationships to the past.

Both texts are crucial for investigating the role of literary memory in the process of GDR remembrance in light of their respective dates of publication: 1990 (*Was bleibt*) and 2010 (*Stadt der Engel*). The modes of remembrance in these texts offer crucial insights into the GDR past at two very different points in time: (1) 1989-1993 as the period of societal and cultural reorientation, (2) 2010 when the anniversary of the fall of the wall encouraged many to reassess the past two decades of commemorative work that had shaped the understanding of the GDR and the historical event of Germany's unification.

The analysis of *Was bleibt* offers critical insight into central issues at stake during the time it was written (in 1979) and in the phase of societal and cultural reorientation in the immediate post-wall years. The novella is a daily account of an East German writer in the late-1970s about the impact of her *Stasi* observation. As a historical document of the socio-political climate of the GDR in the late 1970s, the novella provides an understanding of the failed socialist endeavor and emerges as a record of leftist assumptions and projections, struggling to anticipate a socialist future. Read in the context of the early 1990s, the text became *the* literary and intellectual focal point of a heated post-wall discussion that was also indicative of the intense struggle over a (re)assessment of the past for the sake of charting out a new (literary) identity as a reunited nation and *Kulturgemeinschaft*.

Was bleibt reveals how German society redefined its relationship to the past in light of the massive transformations of the period. The German-German *Literaturstreit* (literary dispute), which unfolded after the publication of *Was bleibt*, testifies to this observation. It proved that the

political step of Germany's unification and the subsequent assessment of the East German past could not be undertaken without a critical examination of Germany's totalitarian past in the twentieth century and its far-reaching ramifications for German literary and cultural production. The way in which the discussion about Christa Wolf as a representative of East Germany's literary apparatus was carried out revealed furthermore that commemorating the former GDR entailed not only a critical examination of the role of writers in an authoritarian regime and their paradoxical role of supporting and critiquing the state at the same time; it also launched a heated debate about literary and cultural developments in both Germanys since the end of World War II, highlighting the significance of literary production in negotiating views of the past.

The chapter then turns to Wolf's novel *Stadt der Engel*. At the time of its publication, which coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the wall, we witness a renewed interest in understanding and coping with the authoritarian nature of the SED-state. Wolf offers a personal account of her past as an informal member (*IM*) of the *Stasi*, a revelation that made the news in early 1993. In the novel, the revelation about the *Stasi* past of her narrator - which the narrator initially claims to have forgotten - triggers remembering and forces her to unearth hitherto suppressed/forgotten memories. Her past as *Stasi* informant provides a mechanism for examining psychological, as well as political, socio-cultural, and personal circumstances as decisive factors in eliciting or repressing memories.

Wolf's protagonist embarks on a painful journey to unearth memories, which initially did not belong to the arsenal with which a seemingly coherent formation of the self was possible and desired. This journey necessitates the splitting of the narrative voices into a *writing-I* of the present (at the time when the text is written down), a *remembered-I* of the early 1990s (at the time her *IM* activity was revealed to the public in 1993), and a *remembering-I* (at the time when

the narrator is forced to retrieve an alleged forgotten memory of her past). The threefold self creates a resonating body of multiple voices that permeate each other, initiating a conversation to break open fixed structures, such as past and present, the remembered and the forgotten, truth and fiction, cause and effect.

Unlike *Was bleibt*, the novel shifts the main focus from questions of moral deficiency, culpable behavior, and personal accountability toward healing, redemption, and forgiveness. The text exposes an inherent link between the psychological mechanisms of remembering/forgetting and the external (political, cultural, ideological) factors that stimulate or inhibit remembering. Wolf does not treat mnemonic self-exploration not as a means to “master” her past; a past that is overcome and left behind, as the German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* suggests. Mnemonic self-exploration rather becomes a necessary act of charting out a meaningful relationship between the past and the present, bringing the past into the service of the present. Understanding the present in light of previously “forgotten” memories instantiates a moving forward, a moving toward a bright future in which the past is not felt as burdensome but as essential in bestowing healing, redemption, and forgiveness from within.

The dissertation then turns to cinematic contributions to GDR remembrance. As both vehicles and constituting forces in the making of cultural memory, films are powerful media, able to monitor, critique, and influence the process of cultural reproduction of a society in which these media emerge and circulate. The images of the past that film conveys have a profound effect on the making cultural memory. By cinematically recalling a past that becomes more and more remote from present life, film reenacts historical experiences as memory. The relationship to the past that film articulates is thus disputed, inconclusive, and malleable in nature. In film, the past is often presented as a spectacle, able to extract affective responses from its viewers and, in

doing so, determine how individuals and a collective form an understanding of their present socio-cultural environment. Making use of the disputed, inconclusive, and malleable nature of memory, film not only has the ability to forge memories of the past, but also to reflect upon these memories, which are deliberated anew via the process of filmic representation and its subsequent reception. As such, film becomes a creative space in which memories of the past are depicted, negotiated, and rendered meaningful in a dialogic process between image and beholder. Studying film in the context of cultural memory allows us to explore the connections between the role of film in reenacting the past and the society – in this case the society of reunited Germany – in which these films acquire meaning.

Two films discussed in this chapter offer cinematic insights into two different time periods: Andreas Kleinert's *Wege in die Nacht* (1999) and Florian Henkel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006). They provide disparate approaches to GDR remembrance. Andreas Kleinert's stylistic art film *Wege in die Nacht* remembers the GDR past through the eyes of Walter, a former business manager in his mid-fifties, who is unemployed, disoriented, and disillusioned in a post-1990 society. Together with two teenagers, Walter roams through the streets of post-wall Berlin, brutally beating all those who seem to undermine the stability and structure of a society that Walter feels has ceased to exist after 1990. The violence reaches its peak when Walter forces a young man to throw himself out of the car of a moving subway train. Compelled by this incident and the false feeling of regained power and authority, Walter is caught in a downward spiral of paranoia, violence, and crime.

Wege in die Nacht is well suited to highlight the changing mode of remembering the past at the end of the decade. In its commemorative approach, the film has a resolute focus on the present. The film's engagement with the GDR is characterized by an absence of past-imagery. It

depicts instead a post-wall present that is imbued by an unresolved past. The depiction of an individual and his attempts to restore some order to his life in a post-wall urban society shows a concern with the need to cope with the uncertainties of a society in transition. In the late 1990s, the question of GDR remembrance was still being debated extensively in political and academic venues. The film responds to both official and cultural attempts of coming to terms with the past. Its rhetoric of loss, desperation, and confusion forbid any attempt to bring closure to the GDR past. The film is self-reflexive in that it abstains from producing images of the past. It instead provides a narrative framework in which the past is the object of present deliberation and thought. As the film's title already suggests, its protagonist remains in the dark - or *moves* even deeper into it - and has thus no prospect for a better future in a unified Germany. The film's commemorative principle of focusing exclusively on the present, and thus eluding depictions of the past, is hence pushed to a new level. This *elusive mode of remembrance* designates the film's reluctance to propose, or even to impose, any concrete images of the past. Kleinert's film underscores that the need to move forward is intrinsically coupled with the demand to confront unresolved problems from the past in the present. Thus, the film identifies what is at stake in remembering the past: the need to articulate meaningful relationships to the past through the present.

Von Donnersmarck's film *Das Leben der Anderen* presents GDR history as opinion. The fictional story remembers the day-to-day operations of the *Stasi* through the State Security Captain Gerd Wiesler: a dedicated communist and reliable force in the ranks of the *Stasi* who becomes a 'good' human being. Being at odds with the social and moral values of a socialist society, Captain Wiesler comes to sympathize with the object of his surveillance, playwright Georg Dreyman, and turns to humanist ideals as he is increasingly exposed to Dreyman's life in

the fine arts. Poetry, music, and drama kindle Wiesler's growing receptivity to a life of love and beauty beyond ideology. As Wiesler is transformed into a morally good human being, the film redeems him and renders reconciliation between victims and perpetrators easy, appealing to our common humanity.

The film utilizes the notion of the oppressive surveillance state as a historical context in order to probe and, ultimately, to consolidate the idea of the transformability of a human being. It stages a 'what if' scenario that requires the historical conditions to be depicted as unquestionably or objectively 'evil' and anti-humanist. In the context of GDR history, this means depicting the former state as purely oppressive. The film appears as a solidifying force within the process of commemorating the former East. Its dissemination of historical images becomes a means by which to reduce the complexity of the GDR past to a mere depiction or opinion of a defunct state and - as the film maintains - its oppressive and inhuman ideology.

The film's *assertive mode of remembrance* imposes a certain moral perspective onto the historical context of the GDR in order to judge its past retrospectively. The moral framing of what the film defines as intrinsically 'good' derives from the mindset of a post-wall Germany and judges the GDR past for its lack of these values. According to the film's logic, this judgment attains verisimilitude from a luxurious position of retrospective historical knowledge. 'History,' the film maintains, has undone or even negated the values put forth by the defunct workers' and peasant's state. The film positions itself in a trajectory of historical and moral progress, which is only possible due to a privileged position from which to judge the GDR past in retrospect. It does not depict the GDR past 'as it was,' but rather attempts to demonstrate 'how wrong it was.' The film's significant impact on the process of forming cultural memory is to solidify a negative view of the GDR past into a rigid commemorative image. Commemorating the GDR according

to these pre-formulated images exceeds a contemplative scenario of a ‘what if’ in film and exhibits instead a judgmental statement of a ‘what should have been’ in the past.

The final chapter studies how cultural memory is formed into memorial sites. As publically available symbolic spaces, memorials are external articulations of communally negotiated views of the past in the present. They bespeak a thoroughly mediated relationship between the past and those performative acts of remembering in the present. To study the process of memorial creation is thus to investigate how society performs acts of remembering to form a relationship to the past. Bringing individuals into communication as a society, memorial creation reveals how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering. Acts of memorialization thus allow for continuous contemplations about the nature of *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* in the present, expressed through memorial sites and articulated by those invested in the making of cultural memory. In the case of the Berlin Republic, and thus of crucial significance for this study, there is no undisputed agreement as to how to represent the communist past in and through memorial space. This chapter examines the contestational nature of memorial creation, which involves various participants and different approaches to the GDR past. It shows furthermore that memory is *multi-directional*, *disputed*, and *inconclusive*, necessitating a complex decision-making processes.

In particular, this chapter focuses on the extensive procedures of memorial creation regarding two former GDR prison facilities: the central remand facility of the State Security in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and the largest GDR prison for women, *Schloss Hoheneck* in the state of Saxony. In exploring the respective development of these sites, we are able to observe an immediacy of social setting and communal moment, pertaining to all acts of memorialization.

Specifically, the sites under discussion show how cultural meaning derives from the participation of particular and various actors. These multi-directional forms of communication between and amongst actors appear at times top-down, revealing the importance of the German system of governance to offer state subsidies for cultural projects. Multi-directionality is to a certain extent also defined by bottom up initiatives, further highlighting the dynamic aspect of memory culture in contemporary Germany.

The memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen offers insight into the process of memorial creation and highlights the dynamic aspect of German memory culture. The making of cultural memory at the site was undertaken as a collective effort. A crucial principle in the process of memorialization is the notion of *immediacy* regarding the acknowledgment of a historically significant place and the subsequent forming of interest groups fighting to preserve its commemorative value. In the weeks after the fall of the wall, officials and the public identified the State Security Prison in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, which had served as one of the most important and notorious prisons of the Ministry for State Security in the GDR, as a highly sensitive object of great commemorative significance. The case of Hohenschönhausen reveals the diverse and conflicting standpoints regarding GDR memory in reunified Germany. And yet, the continuous debates about the particular commemorative approach at the site reveal cultural memory as a collective process that remains disputed and often inconclusive. Studying the developments at the site brings to the fore that collective memory is a multi-directional process.

The former GDR prison for women Hoheneck offers a unique opportunity for comparison and engagement. The site is only beginning the memorialization process and offers a privileged opportunity to investigate memorial creation from the start. The example of Hoheneck is unique since the its commemorative value had not been recognized officially for more than a

decade, despite numerous public efforts to draw attention to the historical significance of the former prison facility. Hoheneck is a prime example for the disputed conclusiveness regarding the institutionalized meaning of a site in the process of memorial creation. In addition to these difficulties, the case of Hoheneck reveals that memorial creation demands a remembering society to identify those best *qualified* to testify to the past that will be remembered at the site and *whose story* will be represented in its commemorative grid. The question that this site raises has to do with a renegotiation of the relationship between memory and power, and invokes the reexamination of the role that cultural institutions and grassroots organizations play in this exercise of power to shape cultural memory.

2.0 THE GDR PAST IN LITERATURE: WRITING (ABOUT) HISTORY AS MNEMONIC (SELF) EXPLORATION

Literature (and the entire apparatus encompassing its reception) has always been at the forefront of negotiating views of the past, as well as on commenting on and enhancing the process of re-orientation in the present. As a significant contributor to the analysis and interpretation of events that are culturally important for a community's self-understanding, literary production and its study become increasingly valuable, especially during periods of radical political and societal change. This is particularly true for the political and societal changes in twentieth century Germany at the historical moment in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down, making the disintegration of the GDR and its East Bloc neighbors immanent. With the opening of the GDR state archives, numerous scholars began to reflect on the political, economic, social, and cultural ramifications of unification on Germany and post-communist Europe. At the same time and equally significant, writers (as well as filmmakers, artists, etc. from both East and West) showed a willingness to enter the discussion about the East German past, the reunification process, and the large-scale changes in the German-German relationship (Constabile-Heming 3). Admittedly, former East German writers bore the lion's share of the pressing need to engage in literary *Aufarbeitungsarbeit*. At the same time, they also found themselves being assessed as writers of the 'old regime' in a new, post-communist era, for which the older ideological, aesthetic, and (most often) moral frames of analysis were no longer valid.

Christa Wolf, in particular, East Germany's most prominent, nationally and internationally acclaimed author, was one of the most thoroughly scrutinized writers of the post-*Wende* era. In this process, Wolf became *the* representative figure for former East Germany's literary apparatus as a state-regulated institution, which was subjected to a critical examination by the West. The paradoxical role of writers (and other artists) in the GDR as a state-supported, privileged élite, on the one hand, and as state-controlled, often penalized resisters, on the other hand, complicated the discussion as the East and West literary systems merged. In Wolf's case, it became apparent that her previous status as a "dissident" voice in the GDR faded, transforming her into a critic of the West and its capitalist societies after the fall of the wall.

The literary world of the former GDR had a tradition of defining the status and function of the writer as indispensable for a disenfranchised public and as a substitute for an oppressed public voice (the so-called *Ersatzöffentlichkeit*). Writer and intellectual Wolf had become a literary and moral figurehead in the GDR. As an author she had seemed in close touch with her audience and always true to her role as educator, a kind of literary 'surrogate mother' whose texts supported and accompanied each person's quest for self-discovery in a restrictive society. Wolf continued this tradition and assumed the role of spokeswoman for the people and their revolutionary cause in the summer and fall of 1989. In so doing, she did not shy away from the responsibility of making her political and ideological pleas heard. Even if her most well-known public statement *Aufruf: Für unser Land* on November 28, 1989, made it apparent that she did not embrace the idea of a unified Germany, but instead argued for socialist reform from within an autonomous GDR (a sentiment that her critics retrospectively critiqued as dogmatic, ideologically blind or naïve), the post-*Wende* public could not and would not overlook the importance of the political and literary persona of Wolf as the new post-wall (literary) identity

took shape. The study of Christa Wolf and her texts is thus central for our understanding of the societal and cultural period of reorientation taking place in Germany around the time of the wall fell.

This chapter focuses on two of Wolf's most important prose works for the study of literary memory in the context of contemporary Germany: the novella *Was bleibt* and the novel *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*. Both texts are exemplary of Wolf's literary critique during a time of drastic political and societal change. *Was bleibt* and *Stadt der Engel* are crucial for investigating the role of literary memory in the process of GDR remembrance in light of their respective dates of publication: 1990 (*Was bleibt*) and 2010 (*Stadt der Engel*). Both works offer specific modes of literary remembrance and, thus, offer crucial insights into the GDR past at two very different points in time: 1989-1993 (as the period of societal and cultural reorientation) and 2010 (when the anniversary of the fall of the wall encouraged many to reassess the past two decades of commemorative work that has shaped our understanding of the GDR and the historical event of Germany's unification). Specifically, the two texts probe the concept of remembering within the literary medium. They seek to explore the possibilities of the literary medium as an indispensable tool for informing the present with the past. Thus, the study of the two texts acknowledges the malleability of memories in the process of societal reorientation. Both, therefore, also allow for greater insight into the ways a society constitutes itself by articulating its relationship to the past.

Especially the discussion of *Was bleibt* and the subsequent *Literaturstreit* testify to the significance of the need for reorientation in the early 1990s. As the daily account of an East German writer in the late-1970s about the impact of *Stasi* observation, *Was bleibt* reveals how German society redefined its relationship to the past in light of the massive transformations of

the period. The text is crucial for our understanding of the process of negotiating views of the GDR past and the reassessment of the role of contemporary literature for cultural self-understanding in a unified Germany. It thus became *the* literary and intellectual focal point of a heated post-wall discussion that was also indicative of the intense struggle over a (re)assessment of the past for the sake of charting out a new (literary) identity as a reunited nation and *Kulturgemeinschaft*.

The first part of the discussion of *Was bleibt* in this chapter is devoted to the German-German *Literaturstreit*. Christa Wolf's status as literary figure - highly respected in both Germanys - triggered a dispute of previously unknown magnitude. While the *Literaturstreit* addressed aesthetic and programmatic issues of Germany's future literary course, it soon launched a much more profound discussion that testified to the continued urgency of coming to terms with Germany's authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century.

The second part of my discussion of *Was bleibt* examines the text itself in the light of its potential to reflect on the conditions and possibilities of literary writing and literary remembrance at two critical points in GDR history: 1979 and 1990. I discuss *Was bleibt* as 1) an historical document of the year 1979 and as 2) an anticipatory text of the year 1990. As *historical* document, *Was bleibt* is most valuable for the study of literary memory of the GDR *during* its existence and in the months directly *after* its decline. The text from 1990 is thus not only an engaged appraisal of "what remains" of the GDR past in post-wall Germany. It is also a self-reflexive piece about its own existence as an historical commentary of the time it was written. It thus provides important insights into the workings of individual and collective remembering in literature. In its function as *anticipatory text*, *Was bleibt* points at the need to begin the process of historicizing the socialist endeavor long before the factual end of the state. The novella indicates

the onset of GDR remembrance, a process that only came to full fruition on a large scale after the actual decline of the state.

Treating Wolf's novella in light of this dual function - as historical document and anticipatory text - will reveal a process of mnemonic (self-) exploration from which insights are to be gained, not only about the narrating self, but also about the socio-cultural context in which the text is actualized. Wolf's strategy of splitting the narrating voice conflates past, present, and future. Her text thus challenges a linear understanding of historical time. In the act of reversing the conventional order of temporality, Wolf's writing and remembering achieves a reconstructive rather than a mere causal, or empirical, sense of history (Konzett 441).

Stadt der Engel was published in 2010, or roughly two decades after the fall of the wall and just one year before Wolf's death in December 2011. It is an exemplary document for a time when Germany looked back at twenty years of GDR commemoration. It is also Wolf's second, and last, post-wall novel after *Medea. Stimmen* (1996). Her novel was the first novelistic attempt to come to terms with the GDR past and her first assessment of Germany's post-wall political and societal development. However, the commemorative tone of the earlier novel remains distant and impersonal. Wolf appropriates Greek myth to discuss social marginalization and scapegoating via a female protagonist. With the publication of *Stadt der Engel*, she offers a more personal account of the past as an informal member of the *Stasi*, a revelation about Wolf that made the news in early 1993. The novel certainly was the long anticipated literary statement regarding this revelation. Accordingly, Wolf's audience seemed to expect a more conclusive endeavor of GDR-*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and thus a literary closure with the past in complete narrative prose. Wolf's novel is of course commemorative of the GDR and her *Stasi* past. It features a Wolf-like person in the form of a female first-person narrator who - like Wolf

at the time - issues a public statement about her *IM* activity during a nine-month research stay at the Getty Foundation in Santa Monica, California. The narrator forces herself to revisit the time when she was listed as an informal *Stasi* member, which she seems to have forgotten over the course of time. Nonetheless, Wolf's novel by no means attempts to find closure regarding the GDR past. It instead foregrounds questions about the act of remembering, preserving memories, and recollections that can constantly assume new or even ambiguous meaning. Especially the question of *how* we forget - willingly or forcefully - is at the center of the novel. Mingling elements of fiction with autobiographical gestures, Wolf's text is thus an important literary contribution to the understanding of memory, remembering, and, most prominently, forgetting in the socio-cultural context of post-wall Germany.

Written twenty years after the fall of the wall, the text draws a picture of the political climate of post-wall Germany, in which the question of complicity with an authoritarian regime was often discussed. Wolf's narrator, however, is only marginally concerned with personal guilt or moral failure. Her past as *Stasi* informant provides a mechanism for examining psychological, as well as political, socio-cultural, and personal circumstances as decisive factors in eliciting or repressing memories. Towards the end of the novel, this analysis is increasingly overwritten by broad contemplations about the nexus between memory and history, as well as recollections of the past and historiography in general. Hence, the novel gradually loses touch with the historical context that it initially set out to examine. Instead of radically positioning herself to examine the former role as writer with profound ideological convictions, Wolf seeks redemption and forgiveness within herself by making the past a meaningful and essential part of her present self.

2.1 1989-1993: THE PERIOD OF SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL REORIENTATION - *WAS BLEIBT* AND THE LITERATURSTREIT

The months leading up to the publication of Christa Wolf's novella *Was bleibt* in June 1990 were characterized by deep insecurity on the part of East German writers. The collapse of the GDR literary system, the speedy process of uniting the two literary systems under new conditions of the social market economy, and the loss of solidarity amidst the decline of the various GDR *Schriftstellerverbände* (writers unions) contributed to a profound and fundamental feeling of loss concerning role of literature as a *Leitmedium* (guiding medium) with significant political, social, and educational responsibilities. Especially during the periods before the decisive democratic vote in March 1990, many East German writers - among them Wolf - clung to the idea of a reformable socialist system. Accordingly, many authors, at once part of a literary and privileged elite, still defined themselves in their traditional role as "vanguards" with a "critical consciousness" of the former socialist nation (Emmerich 456). In the months after the fall of the wall and before the vote in March, their political engagement ranged from public appeals for the continuation of the socialist experiment under reformed circumstances to participation in drafting a new constitution for the GDR. The results of the vote bluntly revealed the gap between the wishes of the people and the literary elite. With their slogan "No more socialist experiments" and the promise to raise the level of East German prosperity to that of the West, the East German CDU gained a majority (Wittek 14). The initial inability to question the scope and structure of the "delusional" belief in the socialist project on part of the East German intelligentsia would later be a major point of criticism against GDR authors in the so-called *Literaturstreit* that took place shortly after the vote in March.

It is thus understandable that no *Wenderoman* as an all-encompassing, complete literary reflection on the end of the GDR was published in the immediate aftermath. Only a few years later do we find very cautious first attempts of ‘coming to terms’ with the rapid and unexpected disintegration of the GDR state. Examples are Brigitte’s *Unter dem Namen Norma* (1994), Erich Loest’s *Nikolaikirche* (1995), or Thomas Brussig’s *Helden wie wir* (1995) (Emmerich 499-501). Unable to draw a big picture of the historical events of the time, literary production of the immediate post-wall years focused on smaller literary forms such as essays, interviews, and speeches, discussions, and protocols. The main goal was to document the process of public upheaval and to describe possibilities of political and societal transformation. The literary elite had to adjust to the rapidly changing conditions of the literary system in the months following Germany’s unification. While the take-over of the Eastern literary system by the West meant a radical shift in the conditions of literary production, the lifting of censorship and growing literary market opened up new journalistic possibilities. Thus, the literary focus was first and foremost on the preservation of texts documenting the revolutionary upheaval leading to the subsequent fall of the SED-regime and deliberations on the possibilities for democratic reforms. Two volumes from 1990, namely *Wir sind das Volk - Flugschriften, Aufrufe und Texte einer deutschen Revolution* (edited by Charles Schüddekopf) and *Die sanfte Revolution. Prosa, Lyrik, Protokolle, Erlebnisberichte, Reden* (edited by Stefan Heym and Werner Heiduczek) testify to these endeavors and highlight the importance of public protest movements as the democratic force behind the political changes. Meanwhile, and as a preliminary step toward a (self-critical) assessment of the GDR past and the role of the literary elite, was the installation of a historical commission that set out to scrutinize the conflicting role of the three main GDR writing

associations (the *DDR-Schriftstellerverband*, the *Akademie der Künste der DDR*, and the *PEN-Zentrum der DDR*) during the SED-regime (Emmerich 541).

Against this background, it is not surprising that Christa Wolf's first contribution to the literary appraisal of the GDR past received great attention. The publication of her novella *Was bleibt* was considered one of the first important prose commentaries regarding the political status of the GDR by one of East Germany's most prominent authors. Already its title promised to shed light on "what remains" of the turbulent months between the fall of 1989 and spring of 1990. The text was written in 1979, but Wolf never published it. She began revising the piece in the fall of 1989. When it was finally published in June 1990, the GDR state had ceased to exist as a sovereign political entity, and preparations for the unification treaty had begun. The hope for socialist reform within the GDR was dead.

Wolf's text initiated a passionate, often combative public conversation about the inevitable task of assessing the forty years of real-existing socialism, as well as the reasons for its decline and how it would be remembered. The question "*Was bleibt?*" soon turned into a discursive and rigorously debated set of more fundamental *Gretchenfragen*: what remains of the *Gedankengut* (socialist spirit) in the present, which was now debunked as both naïve longing for an enlightened, more humanitarian society and as a devious ideological grounding for state oppression and authoritarian thinking? What remains of the leftist intellectual pretense to provide a *literature engagée* that could claim to act as the moral conscience of a people? What remains of the artistic and aesthetic value of GDR literature that was once celebrated (especially by West Germany's left) as an important voice from the 'better' Germany but was now suspicious of aesthetic doctrinism and ideological bigotry? What remains of the long-standing, broadly based consensus and self-understanding of (mainly West) German left and liberal intellectuals whose

persistent criticism of the “German conditions” had helped to improve and legitimize the former FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) and thus contributed to its institutional stability and evolution since the 1960s (Huyssen, “The Failure of German Intellectuals” 116)?

Wolf’s novella became the starting block for the fiercely led German-German *Literaturstreit* in 1990, a literary quarrel that provided a venue for the discussion of pressing *gesamtdeutsche* (all-German) issues that harked back to the historical legacy of the Hitler regime and thus concerned decades of literary and cultural commemorative work in both East and West Germany. While at the beginning, the focus was on Christa Wolf, the literary system of the GDR, the role of its authors, and the West German attitude towards GDR literature and its authors, the discussion soon branched out and targeted broader cultural aspects of major importance, such as the role of German intellectuals in the past and the charting out of a new all-German intellectual consensus.

In general, the debate underscored once again that the process of reflecting on the recent past of both Germanys took place simultaneously and in tandem; the two German pasts could not be dealt with separately. This historical, intellectual, and spiritual interconnectedness of the two German states gained more and more prominence. The debate also testified to the liveliness of a democratic *Streitkultur* (culture of democratic debate) in the process of forming a new German self-image. The importance of contemporary German literature and, especially, of Christa Wolf and her literary oeuvre became evident. The debate highlighted the power of literature to draw on topics imperative for a collective’s self-image by engaging with issues of major political, societal, and cultural concern. The central question remaining after the end of the GDR revolved around the problematic entanglement of ideology, art, and morality. As the *Literaturstreit* shows, the historical caesura of 1989/1990 seemed to offer the chance to reassess Germany’s intellectual

and cultural past. The impending (re)definition of the role of intellectuals, writers, and artists in the new Germany required the charting of desirable paths for the future.

Literary scholar Wolfgang Emmerich argues that the question of the moral integrity of GDR authors (and other artists of state-controlled institutions) first arose in early 1991. According to Emmerich, it became a decisive factor for the admission of authors into the newly formed *gesamtdeutsche Schriftstellerverband* in March 1991 (Emmerich 450-51). However, already in the summer of 1990 and thus months before Germany's unification in October, the same questions had already arisen in the realms of the literary production and critics. The publication of Wolf's novella provided a timely opportunity to reevaluate ideological positioning vis-à-vis moral responsibility and to discuss "a new view of literature that assessed the value of a work primarily by the political and social attitudes that it conveyed rather than by its literary or artistic qualities" (Graves, "Was bleibt"). Thus, the West German feuilleton launched a public debate about the moral bearings of GDR authors and the cultural production in the former GDR. During this debate it became apparent that Christa Wolf's previous status as a "dissident" voice in the GDR had ceased to exist. As a result, she immediately became an object of unrelenting criticism, and was transformed into a critic of the West and its capitalist societies.

The controversy about Christa Wolf's literary oeuvre and (moral) status as a literary and political person was characterized by uncommon ferocity. As an immediate reaction to *Was bleibt*, two of West Germany's most famous newspapers, *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* initiated it, although Wolf, her work, and her double-role as representative and dissident of GDR culture had already been the subject of fierce criticism months earlier by Marcel Reich-Ranicki. Literary editor Ulrich Greiner from *Die Zeit* saw Wolf's text as evidence of a dishonorable political and literary calculation that had helped to preserve rather than to

challenge the oppressive structures of GDR politics. He mainly drew on what he saw as Wolf's opportunistic claim to victim status when it seemed most convenient for her (U. Greiner, "Mangel an Feingefühl"). Frank Schirmacher from the FAZ questioned Wolf's entire literary achievement, drawing on her alleged role as *Staatsdichterin*, a state laureate, and exposed Wolf as an example of the entire German (left oriented) intelligentsia, who embodied the failure to adequately respond to the abuse of state power for the second time in Germany's twentieth century history. By addressing Wolf's inability to recognize the true nature of the SED-regime and to place her literary services at the party's disposal, Schirmacher invokes earlier instances of misguided state-loyal behavior of German intellectuals and writers. Martin Heidegger or Gottfried Benn are well-known examples of a blindness to authoritarian (national socialist) rule. "Schirmacher's polemic," Huyssen writes, "equates Wolf (as representative of the GDR literary apparatus) with intellectual supporters of fascism in order...to prove the analogy between Wolf and the dominant West German literary culture" ("The Failure of German Intellectuals" 135).

In a subsequent article "Farewell to the Literature of the Federal Republic" from October 2, 1990, Schirmacher used Christa Wolf as a case in point to expand the discussion about the failure of German intellectuals in general, from both East and West. The sentiment of a fundamental *j'accuse* allows him to see Wolf as a paradigm of authoritarian thinking and state-entangled writing. This attack was read as an attempt of a younger generation of critics (mainly from the FRG) to challenge not just the ideological predicament of East German writers but also the left-liberal consensus of all German intellectuals in the postwar era (Graves, "Was bleibt"). Schirmacher's attempt to bid farewell to the entire postwar literary tradition entailed discrediting East German literature as a crippling bourgeois, authoritarian conformism. The dilemma of a commonly defined antifascist belief, Schirmacher argues, prevented East German

writers (and their West German supporters who readily granted them a ‘dissident bonus’) from adequately critiquing the state and motivating a belated *Widerstandsethos* (ethics of resistance). This forced *Widerstandsethos* would appear in retrospect as cowardly and opportunistic. The literary and aesthetic claim to provide an *Ersatzöffentlichkeit* and a critical moral voice via artistic expression thus seemed to have revealed itself as a complete farce (Schirmmacher, “Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten”).

The term that came to denote the main target of the discussion was *Gesinnungsästhetik* (loosely translated as aesthetic of moral conviction), introduced by Ulrich Greiner of *Die Zeit*. Greiner’s allusion to and modification of Max Weber’s term *Gesinnungsethik* seemed to suit the literary discussion about the “marriage of convenience” between literature and morality (U. Greiner, “Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik”). Equating authorial and moral intent of a literary work, Greiner considers the entire German literary production of the post-war era in both East and West as an articulation of the moral self. His fierce criticism of Christa Wolf in this regard is intended to scrutinize and critique a decade-long *Kulturkampf* (cultural struggle), which had produced a radical *literature engagé* on both sides of the wall. Looking at West German literary production after 1945, Greiner spiritually unites writers from East and West in their joint attempt to function as a moral conscience of the (respective) nation, fighting notions of restoration, fascism, clericalism, etc. that do not necessarily belong to literature. Citing the traditional moral implications of literary texts by Böll, Grass, Lenz, Fried, Walser, H.M. Enzensberger, Weiss, Andersch, and others, Greiner argues that such authors have been entangled in a philosophy of history that defines their moral actions as writing subjects according to a specific historical trajectory. The historical caesura of 1989 seems to mark the break with this tradition. Not only did Germany’s unification witness the beginning of literature as more market-oriented rather

than predominantly critical, and political, medium. Greiner also sees it as liberating authors from the alleged dogma of literary-moral historicity. He thus aligns himself with the neo-conservative and rational trajectory of political and historical thinking, the so-called *Tendenzwende*, which had its origins in the 1970s and gained new momentum from Kohl's conservative-liberal coalition government. Greiner's sentiment is exemplary for the hope for a true turnaround, which was fed substantially by the Anglo-American models of the Thatcher and Reagan "revolutions" and the final dissolution of the GDR state. His argument reveals a desire to break with the cultural heritage and centrality of the *Gruppe 47*, whose members collectively engaged the political and moral aspects of post-war Germany that came to define West German identity (Vogt 54). Greiner's article also discloses his resistance to approaching the GDR past and its literature according to these traditional paradigms and the will to establish a new view of the (literary and cultural) past.

Literary scholar Thomas Anz provides one of the earliest scholarly assessments of the *Literaturstreit*. In his volume with the telling title *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf. Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, Anz and other contributors convincingly show that despite the new historical situation of 1989, the arguments put forth by Greiner and Schirmmacher were actually reappropriations from earlier literary and cultural discourses. Greiner's critique of West Germany's postwar literature echoed the sentiment of the *Züricher Literaturstreit* of 1966. In his fierce critique of Peter Weiss's political literature, Emil Staiger, who was a member of the Swiss National Front, Nazi sympathizer, and acolyte of Martin Heidegger, invoked an interpretation of Friedrich Schiller's aesthetics of the liberating force of art without political or moral subservience (*Dienstbarkeit*) in order to restore the prime directive of aesthetics and autonomous art to contemporary German literature. Anz also exposes Schirmmacher's desire to

bid farewell to the literary tradition of the FRG as a recurring theme. Already during the political and cultural upheavals of 1968, H.M. Enzensberger, Leslie Fiedler, and Walter Boehlich counted among the writers and critics who challenged the *Gruppe 47* and its understanding of West Germany's postwar literature. They critiqued the notion of a monopoly of a moralizing art form that had claimed for itself the right to be the critical conscience of a people and the ultimate provider of memory work. In a similar vein, literary critic Jochen Vogt dismantled Schirmacher's critique of the long unchallenged tradition of a literature engagé in the FRG, which had its roots in the unquestioned status of the literary institution of the *Gruppe 47*. Vogt points out that in the cultural climate of the conservative and prudish 1950s, members of the group (especially Heinrich Böll) faced the fierce allegation of being "Nestbeschmutzer, Ratten, und Schmeißfliegen" (56-57). Only later and despite a critical opposition in the later 1960s did it come to define the classical canon of Germany's postwar literature.

If we expand Greiner and Schirmacher's critique of Christa Wolf, we must acknowledge that both use her and her novella, as an example of GDR literature, to link the intellectual culture of both postwar-Germanys with the tradition of German authoritarianism. However, this history not only ignores the major differences between the two German states, it also establishes a false parallel that evaluates their respective pasts from a privileged standpoint in the present. While it is legitimate to point to the lack of radically new literary developments in the former West Germany and to assess the restrictive frameworks for GDR writers, it remains shortsighted to evaluate the literary production of FRG through the snapshot of its ending and GDR literature from the standpoint of its collapse (Huyssen, "The Failure of German Intellectuals" 136).

Furthermore, Greiner and Schirmacher's attacks expose a significant political agenda behind their arguments. Their critical sentiments reveal an intense struggle for an interpretive

high ground (*Deutungshoheit*) from which to view the GDR past and so the past of reunited post-war Germany as well including their expression in cultural institutions. Evoking a newly emerging historical vantage point, Greiner and Schirmacher rush to announce the end of history or, conversely, the birth of a new history that warrants a new perspective on the past and the future. This kind of historical “Nullpunktdenken,” as Andreas Huyssen describes it (“Das Versagen der deutschen Intellektuellen” 89) is best expressed in Greiner’s own words: “Es geht um die Durchsetzung einer Lesart. Wer bestimmt, was gewesen ist, der bestimmt auch, was sein wird. Der Streit um die Vergangenheit ist ein Streit um die Zukunft” (“Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik”). While some have assessed the events of 1989 in prescriptive rather than descriptive terms and announced the “end of history” (see Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man*), the cultural debate taking place in the months after the fall of the wall offered a variety of responses to humanity’s socio-cultural development ranging from nostalgia and even melancholy about of the past through hopes for reform of the socialist endeavor to a will to wipe the historical slate clean. Both Greiner and Schirmacher’s approach to the debate makes clear that the quarrel over interpretative hegemony does not solely concern the literary scene. The experience of the historical caesura of 1989 provided the opportunity to express a general (intellectual and cultural) desire for a radical new departure in Germany’s cultural policy (*Kulturpolitik*). It is telling that during the process of reorientation a charting out of a new direction took place by drawing exclusively on the deficiencies of the literary and cultural heritage of both German states. The critical appraisal revealed an ultimate will to break with this past by triggering a cultural caesura.

In this context, the publication of *Was bleibt* triggered a belated *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that only fully emerged during the *Literaturstreit*. The fact that

literary heritage became the focal point of the discussion about Germany's cultural past bespeaks the importance of literature to provide and contribute to memory work. The general sentiment to break with the literary past of course also questions this role. The turn to a judgment and condemnation in the early 1990s registered negatively with scholars from within Germany and abroad. North American critic Andreas Huyssen showed great concern regarding the (mainly West German) attempt of a quick "Abwicklung," a historical winding down of the pre-wall past. In his mind, the debate was based on a willful forgetting ("Das Vergessen der deutschen Intellektuellen" 83) that impeded any attempt for a critical assessment that the crisis of intellectual discourse had necessitated. The will to forget the (literary) past, or at least to normalize the way we remember the past in literature and intellectual discourse found its historical predecessor in the *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate).

In addition to the alleged need in the late 1980s for a redefinition of the historical and political self-image, the *Literaturstreit* resembled the historical debate both rhetorically and structurally. In 1986, CDU-chancellor Helmut Kohl and a group of neoconservative historians and philosophers advocated a cultural-political shift from a collective *mea culpa* to a 'normalization' of the (Nazi) past that favored nationalistic revisionism and historical relativism. In the mid-1980s the left and liberal consensus was strong enough to subvert a neoconservative agenda that had pursued the possibility of preemptive war, questioned the uniqueness of the Nazi crimes, including the Holocaust, and that applied a comparative approach to totalitarian states by equating the crimes committed by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The post-*Wende* neoconservative turn that was played out in the realm of literature and literary critics drew on similar strategies in pursuit of a new self-image of the Berlin Republic. To secure the promising future of the united nation, it would have to rid its burdensome past.

Similar to the *Historikerstreit*, the wish for the renewal of a national self-image necessitated a selective view of the (cultural) past and the strategic assignment of moral guilt. But unlike the triumph of the left intelligentsia in the mid-1980s, the political facts - Germany's immediate unification - turned the table on the left intelligentsia. The political and historical facts seemed to override, if not ridicule, previous fears of a pan-German future. Thus, on February 9, 1990, West German writer Günter Grass could still assume the role of a moral arbiter and fall back into historical determinism:

Der deutsche Einheitsstaat verhalf der nationalsozialistischen Rassenideologie zu einer entsetzlich tauglichen Grundlage. An dieser Erkenntnis führt nichts vorbei. Wer gegenwärtig über Deutschland nachdenkt und Antworten auf die deutsche Frage sucht, muß Auschwitz mitdenken. Der Ort des Schreckens, als Beispiel genannt für das bleibende Trauma, schließt einen zukünftigen deutschen Einheitsstaat aus. (Grass)

The *Realpolitik* of the *Wendezeit*, however, seemed to debunk the arguments of the liberal anti-revisionists and, as literary scholar Irene Heidelberger-Leonard points out, retrospectively unmasked the irrelevance of their post-national theses from 1986 (76).

In sum, the *Literaturstreit* revealed the attempt to eradicate the cultural past of both Germanys. For the sake of establishing a new cultural era, defined by a willful forgetting of the burdensome past of Germany's twentieth century, some approached the past selectivity. It also showed how complex structures of literary and cultural productions were short-circuited in order to accomplish a speedy *Abwicklung* of the past. Despite the obvious argumentative flaws behind the attack on Christa Wolf and the German left intelligentsia, the *Literaturstreit* proved the urgent need for redefinition – and not a radical annihilation – of the role of left and liberal intellectuals, writers, and artists in the new Germany. This need, Andreas Huyssen argues, had to emerge from within the left and liberal intelligentsia of both Germanys (114). He writes:

East and West, the rhetoric and behavior of German intellectuals seemed mostly out of step with the events [during the year of the *Wende*]. It lacked sovereignty, perspective,

and compassion; it betrayed self-indulgence and arrogance, a fatal aloofness from reality and a desperate clinging to projections, and, when under fire, melancholic self-pity and unrepentant self-righteousness...Thus it is both necessary and prophylactic to admit a sense of failure...But rather than shedding political identities of the past...or sinking into the paralysis of the loser's melancholy, intellectuals...need to admit error, analyze the nature of their delusions and political projections, and...admit that a thorough reorientation is the order of the day. ("The Failure of German Intellectuals" 110-11)

Huyssen's critique of the German intellectuals and his request for a thorough internal reassessment of their role was echoed by others who defied a facile dismissal of GDR literature and Christa Wolf's work on the basis of a retrospect discounting (*Abrechnung*) of GDR authors and their literary and political biographies (Emmerich 467). Although Wolf kept a low public profile during the debate, in a speech devoted to Hans Mayer, a literary critic at the Universities of Leipzig and Tübingen, she spoke her own voice in this debate, steering the conversation in a more meaningful direction: "Es wäre so wichtig, die richtigen Fragen zu stellen. Selten geschieht es...Der Ansturm der Ereignisse hat die Differenzierungsfähigkeit überrannt. Wir müssen auf Konkretheit bestehen und aufpassen, dass uns nicht das Leben genommen wird, das wir wirklich geführt haben" (qtd. in Deiritza and Krauss 9). Instead of engaging forcefully in the debate by rushing to her own defense, however, Wolf seemed to point indirectly at her own texts and to *Was bleibt* in particular. The analysis of *Was bleibt* shows that Wolf had begun the process of critical *Selbstverständigung* long before the fall of the wall. Her supposed *Wendehalsmentalität* (which suggests the tendency to "save one's neck" by opportunistically recontextualizing one's actions with the help of historical hindsight) does not therefore seem to be appropriate. *Was bleibt* is in fact Wolf's critical assessment of her role as a GDR author and political spokesperson at the time of its creation in 1979 and its publication in 1990. It illustrates the shortcomings of language and thus of Wolf's own writing in its desire to understand and give an account of oneself and one's time. As such, the text is also an attempt to respond to the inadequacies of the

literary medium and its ability to enlist the (utopian) imagination in the service of social and political transformation. The search for a 'new language' in *Was bleibt* furthermore highlights Wolf's relentless effort to exceed the limitations of language, her writing, and the literary medium and to anticipate change in the future. The text evokes a future as the horizon of a 'not-yet' in the present.

2.2 *WAS BLEIBT* AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT AND ANTICIPATORY TEXT

When Wolf published *Was bleibt* in 1990, she presented an historical document that bespeaks a time in the past (in the late 1970s) that was defined by a personal and societal crisis in the GDR. The work therefore also provides evidence for a period of reorientation within GDR cultural politics and an initial literary appraisal of the GDR past shortly after the state's demise. The dual function of *Was bleibt* as historical and anticipatory text is already echoed in its title. *Was bleibt* asks for the results or the remains, of an endeavor that has effectively come to an end and, thus, warrants a first critical assessment.

Placed in the historical context of 1979, the text comments critically on the damaging effects of state terror and state surveillance for a society and each of its members during the existence of the GDR. But it can also be read as an early articulation of the anticipated end of socialism and the utopian ideas that had provided the ideological framework for its (failed) realization. Specifically, *Was bleibt* depicts the societal and individual consequences of the of GDR's restrictive cultural policy around the time it was written. In 1969, the GDR Writer's Council significantly redefined the role of GDR writers by officially underscoring their function as the vanguards and moral conscience of the people in realizing a model socialist society. By

the same token, the Council confirmed the hegemony of the SED party in all issues of a culture and art, which ultimately undermined the notion of a literary autonomy and the possibility for art to function as a critical voice or cultural seismograph of political and societal critique. This paradox was declared a modernization of the literary apparatus that aimed at the annihilation of any individual voice in GDR literature and sought to implement a manageable “Kollektivwesen Literatur” (Bogdal 43-45). What state officials celebrated as the apex of literary culture in GDR society, GDR authors experienced as a deep crisis that seriously questioned their literary future.

The crisis reached its peak with the forced expatriation of songwriter Wolf Biermann and Wolf’s subsequent placement under *Stasi* surveillance. Commenting on the political background of the time when *Was bleibt* was written, Wolf explained the reasons for a deeply personal and professional crisis, which she sought to describe in the semi-autobiographical text *Was bleibt*:

Das war in einer Zeit, da ich mich selbst veranlasst sah, die Voraussetzungen von Scheitern zu untersuchen, den Zusammenhang von gesellschaftlicher Verzweiflung und Scheitern in der Literatur. Ich habe damals stark mit dem Gefühl gelebt, mit dem Rücken an der Wand zu stehen und keinen richtigen Schritt mehr tun zu können. Ich musste über eine Zeit hinwegkommen, in der es absolut keine Wirkungsmöglichkeiten mehr zu geben schien (*Essays, Gespräche, Reden* 236).

The reasons for the crisis of the writing-I and the “difficulties of saying ‘I,’” as she already lamented in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968), can be found in the task of paradoxically exploring utopian possibilities - or *Wirkungsmöglichkeiten* - within the narrow confines of real-existing socialism and the limitations imposed by the restrictive state and its oppressive surveillance system. This is most apparent when the narrator in *Was bleibt* becomes aware of the discrepancies between the idea of socialism - upheld by utopian longing that is intrinsically tied to her identity as writer and cultural visionary - and the present reality of the late 1970s in which the failures of real-existing socialism keeps the utopian idea in its death grip. Every attempt of the narrator in *Was bleibt* to reach beyond these confinements impedes the literary effort to make

“das unsichtbare Wesentliche” appear (*Was bleibt* 14, henceforth WB) and thus bespeaks the real-life experiences of GDR writers in the late 1970s.

Early in the text, Wolf’s narrator speaks for the entire group of writers when she comes to the ultimate awareness: “So sprachen wir immer, am wahren Text vorbei” (22). Read in the context of the late 1970s, *Was bleibt* does not assume the role of a groundbreaking manifesto that reaches beyond its limitations as text in order to (re)envision a socialist society that had once existed as past idea and restored the “geheime Feuer, [das] im Inneren dieser Stadt geglüht hatte” (30). Nor is the text a pamphlet that calls for a massive public upheaval to fight the prevailing conditions or - even more daringly - the representatives of the oppressive regime. The narrator admits early in the text “Was mir fehlt ist ein gesunder nivellierender Hass” (16), which would entail hating herself, since she is an intrinsic part of this society and its lamented conditions. *Was bleibt* is instead a prosaic articulation of the drab realization that the utopian idea (for which the narrator “still does not yet have a name”) has no language, no place, no history, and no future: “Aus einem Ort war die Stadt zu einem Nicht-Ort geworden, ohne Geschichte, ohne Vision, ohne Zauber, verdorben durch Gier, Macht und Gewalt” (31). Unable to name the utopian idea and to find a *Vergangenheitssprache* (a language of the past) that would describe past hopes, the text provides no textual space to reimagine the socialist spirit that had still imbued earlier works such as *Moskauer Novelle* (1961) or *Der geteilte Himmel* (1964). The utopian idea of the past continually escapes literary reconstruction, thwarting the very possibility to revive or re-experience it either in the present or foreseeable future.

The text marks the point in Wolf’s writing career when she begins to historicize her experiences in the GDR *during* its very existence in order to anticipate a better understanding of her present and future (historical) circumstances. This difficult endeavor was overlooked by

Wolf's most fierce detractors however, who first and foremost accused her of a reluctance to admit error and moral culpability in supporting a totalitarian state by upholding ideological misbeliefs and perpetuating utopian chimeras through her writing. *Was bleibt*, which became the starting block for the attack on Wolf and the *Literaturstreit*, is actually her most self-critical piece: a text that seeks out reasons for the failed socialist endeavor and reexamines the role writers played at this ideological impasse. While part of her critique draws on the "rücksichtlosen Augenblicksvorteil" of "die Herren, [die] unangefochten [ihre] Stadt beherrschten" (WB 30) and thus accuses others for the dismay, the text first and foremost questions the writer's personal responsibility in past political, social, and historical circumstances, leading to a critical scrutiny of her consciousness and subjective experiences. Thus, the text draws on the essential need for an understanding of the past and present self in order to assess current circumstances and anticipate a livable future that is not-yet foreseeable.

Already in Wolf's novella *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979), written in the same year of *Was bleibt* and thus thematically close to it, Wolf scrutinized the connection between literature and (artistic, political, and personal) failure by transferring the events to German Romanticism, and the fictitious meeting of Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode. However, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* is still optimistic enough to seek out literary options to overcome a fundamental feeling of (self-) alienation in a socialist society. It is still a utopic expression that embraces the notion of social transformability within the realm of ideology and art. In *Was bleibt*, by contrast, the feeling of loss, self-alienation, and hopelessness is all-encompassing. The dystopic rhetoric renders it a first commemorative attempt to assess critically the socialist endeavor that seems caught up in the restrictive typifications of ideology and art, which it questions as essentially

different, yet complementary in their shared aspiration toward social transformation and the sense of crisis that accompanies it (Konzett 438).

And yet, *Was bleibt* is not exemplary of a “dumpfe Trauerarbeit” by a GDR author, as Wolf’s opponents in the *Literaturstreit* thought (Wittek 110). Already on the first page, when the narrator announces her goal to understand “wie ich in zehn, zwanzig Jahren an diesen...Tag zurückdenken würde” (WB 7), the text offers the slim hope to overcome the crisis, even in the impossible context of the late 1970s. Although the narrator fears that “all diese nichtswürdigen Tage nichts [zu einer Erkenntnis] beisteuern und deshalb unaufhaltsam im Strom des Vergessens abtreiben [würden]” (9), she sees in the effort of writing and thoroughly documenting her memories on paper a means to extend the boundaries of the literary medium and to explore future possibilities. In order to gain objective insights into her historical entanglements as a writer, she states: “In heller Angst, in panischer Angst wollte ich mich jetzt an einen dieser dem Untergang geweihten Tage klammern und ihn festhalten” (9). The act of writing should secure “Zukunftserinnerungen” (Wolf, *Die Dimension des Autors* 502) or the memoirs that will allow the narrator to evaluate a present that will become her past during the course of writing. In *Was bleibt*, the narrator draws on the importance of anticipating future memories when she asks: “Einmal würde ich alt sein. Und wie würde ich mich dieser Tage dann erinnern?” (WB 7). The tracing of her past and the anticipation of future memories that become communicable (as text) highlights the essence of all commemorative endeavors to understand “wie...wir so geworden [sind], wie wir heute sind” (Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* 276).

Frequently in the text, the possibilities of the literary medium to communicate the memories of an individual collide with the “dishonorable” (WB 47) effort of the *Stasi* to meticulously record everything about “dissident objects” and to find the “truth.” In Wolf’s

depiction, however, *Stasi* records only serve as a means to instrumentalize knowledge. The narrator exposes the alleged omniscient power of the *Stasi* and their aspiration to total knowledge as a vain endeavor: “Das wußte ich besser...[Bei] der Lektüre des zweihundertsiebenunddreißigsten Tagesberichts [packt es den Beamten] ob der Vergeblichkeit seines Tuns...und wenn er sich dann fragt, was er über dieses Objekt wußte,...mußte er sich ehrlicherweise sagen: nichts” (WB 44). The true knowledge about herself that the narrator hopes to convey by writing her experiences down is ultimately not recordable, since it has no name yet. That is, they cannot name the fear and the hopelessness, or their mental and physical ramifications, as they manifest themselves as an overall condition at the horizon of the present and its reality. The text suggests that “dieses geheimnisvolle ‘Es’” (44) becomes communicable in a literary effort to understand the self in self-reflexive texts such as *Was bleibt*. The title *Was bleibt* acquires another meaning in this context. It is the conviction that literature fulfills the promise of Hölderlin’s verse in his poem *Andenken*: “Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter” (353).

The need for reorientation brings forth crucial insights into Wolf’s mode of literary remembering. She approaches memory by relying on four major principles: First, she considers the human capacity to remember as a necessary tool to communicate her subjective experiences to herself. Second, the act of writing is also essential for communicating her personal memories to others. Third, both principals enable her to expand the limiting circumstances of subjective experiences in order to open them up to a socio-cultural context in which remembrance is discussed and performed. Forth, and as a result of the reciprocal relationship between personal memories and collective remembering, the narrator hopes to gain an objective awareness (*Erkenntnisgewinn*) of the self and the time in which it is constituted.

In *Was bleibt*, Wolf utilizes the human ability to remember in order to suspend a linear sense of time for the sake of greater *Erkenntnisgewinn*: “Unser Gehirn ist genügend differenziert, die lineare Ausdehnung der Zeit - nennen wir sie Oberfläche - durch Erinnerung und Vorschau fast unendlich zu vertiefen” (Wolf, *Die Dimension des Autors* 467). By reconstructing rather than describing her experiences in a linear way, Wolf draws on the principal of splitting the narrating self into a *past self* and *present self*, or a *remembered-I* and *writing-I*. This splitting occurs as an interior dialogue between the two selves and invokes a discursive struggle between the first person narrator (the writing-I) and a second voice (the remembered-I), which is expressed in the second person singular. The remembered-I also appears as an internal voice of the writing-I. It thus obtains the status of a self-consciousness. The writing-I writes: “Aufgebracht wollte ich wissen, wer ihn [the interior dialogue partner] eingesetzt habe, und er antwortete ungerührt: Du selbst, Schwester. Wenn du dich bitte erinnern willst” (WB 49). Finally, this interior voice, the remembered-I, becomes a “persönlicher Begleiter,” or personal companion, who is both intrinsically part of the writing-I and proof of the multifaceted dimension of the self: “Ich selbst...Wer war das. Welches der multiplen Wesen, aus denen ‘ich selbst’ mich zusammensetzte” (49). The writing-I thus repeatedly makes apparent the importance of the other, often alienating, voice inside her. In doing so, it also acknowledges the importance of this voice as a driving force in the process of mnemonic self-exploration.

The construction of another (remembered-) I allows for a crucial distancing of the narrator’s subjectively experienced reality and the historical circumstances in which the self is situated. As a further step towards a ‘truer self’ that can achieve a greater *Erkenntnisgewinn*, the text invokes the desire to overcome the splitting of the self and to reach a synthesis in a distant future. Wolf’s narrative strategy to split the narrating self into multiple voices enables it to move

from a level of subjective experience to the level of experience that Wolf has called *subjektive Authentizität* (subjective authenticity). This aesthetic concept of subjective authenticity means that the narrator's experiences gain more truthfulness as the writing-I reflects upon a self in the past (the remembered-I) and acknowledges the differences between the two. The splitting of the self results in a productive tension between the writing-I of the present and the remembered-I of the past and aims at a truer understanding of the self in the present and the self in the past. Through the act of writing, the narrator willingly exposes herself to this tension and realizes that earlier fixed notions of self and its perceived reality (in the present and the past) are in flux. Accordingly, Wolf's text functions like a prism that separates experiences into a spectrum of different and often conflicting perspectives on both the self and reality.

This insight is important for understanding how Wolf's text contributes to the charting out of commemorative modes regarding the remembrance of the former GDR. Her narrating self emerges as self-exploring, self-determined agent that investigates anew the historical circumstances in which it has been constituted. Wolf's concept of subjective authenticity thus defies a fatalistic notion of historical determinism and constitutes a self that actively charts out varying and, importantly, conflicting views of the past. As a result, Wolf opens up interpretive gaps for her readers. As she presents multiple perspectives on how to view the past, she challenges the reader to acknowledge the malleability of memories and the constructive nature of historical 'truth.' Wolf's approach to memory thus challenges the notion of a past as given. She draws instead on the authenticity of past experiences that bring to the fore different qualities and meanings for the past over the course of time.

Wolf's text articulates the idea that individual remembering is inherently shaped by specific socio-cultural contexts. It scrutinizes the interconnectedness of individual remembering,

the mediality of remembering, and the meaning memories assume in a collective context. Hence, Wolf employs memories of her personal past in order to understand the (mental and social-cultural) mechanism that triggered these memories and bestowed meaning upon them. Acknowledging the existence of the situatedness, selectivity, and perspectival aspects inherent in the formation of versions of the past, she traces underlying patterns of how we perceive ourselves in a given context at a given point in time. Already in *Kindheitsmuster* Wolf had attempted to extrapolate systematic structural patterns as driving forces behind historical events. Understanding the fundamental, or typical, patterns of a specific time first enables her to form a later awareness of more general principles about a culture at a given moment. Accordingly, Wolf does not perceive history as past experiences that occur in a linear unfolding of time. Remembering past experiences become meaningful when they are considered indicative of matters of greater concern.

By discussing modes of remembering in *Was bleibt* and extrapolating more general patterns of the past socio-cultural contexts in which memories are elicited, the text accomplishes a greater *Anwendbarkeit* (applicability) - to use a term from Wolf's writing on Bert Brecht (1898-1956). Although the text deals with personal experiences at a particular time in GDR history, the insights that the reader gains allows for the discerning of more general statements about the overall sentiment of the epoch. Wolf's personal experiences as objects of mnemonic reflection become part of a greater collective. Her memories circulate (through the medium literature) and are restored through the analytical gaze of her readership. Thus, her text is continually contrasted new (social, cultural, and epochal) backgrounds. The narrator/Wolf's personal experiences of the times become applicable to different time-frames and present us with the opportunity to discern similarities/ dissimilarities, continuities/discontinuities,

specificities/universalities etc. of different time periods and utilize our findings to examine our own time critically.

In *Was bleibt* the narrator realizes that some of her difficulties in crafting this “new language” and taking a more radical stand are inherent in her urge to conform. Her conformism is an example of a dilemma, that challenged many GDR writers and that Wolf often addresses in literary texts and aesthetic contemplations (*Reden im Herbst* 28, 131). Their urge to stay comfortable and not to jeopardize the luxury of their lives as GDR’s cultural elite is the result of both a hopeless fight to change society through art and the intimidations they feared from the state if they diverged from the official party line: “Wir...traten immer gegen uns selber an, den es log und katzenbuckelte und geiferte und verleumdete aus uns heraus, und es gierte nach Unterwerfung und nach Genuß” (WB 28). Her conformism made her into a “Luxusgeschöpf” (52). This realization alienates Wolf from her former self, which is referenced indirectly in the persona of a young poet and spirited hotspur who is willing to critique the state in more profound ways and to take risks for his beliefs: “Dies war der Unterschied zwischen uns beiden - ein entscheidender. Ein Graben. Mußte ich rüberspringen?” (48).

In order to take this step and leap, the narrator needs to overcome this “other” - whether is conformism, luxury, fear, past experiences. For the “other” not only impedes her writing and the ability to name the problems of her time. It also resists its own overcoming and the splitting that produced “jenes dritte” in the first place: “Ich selbst. Wer war das...Das, das ich kennen wollte? Das das sich schonen wollte? Oder jenes dritte, das immer noch versucht war, nach der selben Pfeife zu tanzen, wie die jungen Herren [von der Stasi] da draußen vor meiner Tür?” (49). The ability at least to acknowledge “jenes dritte” promises to expel these unwelcome parts of

herself into a distant future: “Das wars, was ich brauchte: glauben zu können, dass ich jenen Dritten eines nahen Tages ganz von mir ablösen und aus mir hinausstoßen würde” (50).

The text treats the example of the narrator’s inability to break with the urge to conform as typical of an entire generation of writers in the former GDR and expressive of a more general pattern that can be described as authoritative thinking. By referencing a different historical era in the text, the Nazi era, the text draws analogies between two historical moments that showed instances of authoritative thinking, similar to those detectable within the narrator and other writers in a different historical setting.

The analogies drawn between underlying patterns that both Fascism and Stalinism brought to the fore make the text a broader commemorative appraisal that reaches beyond questions of personal guilt and moral shortcoming. The text envisions a society that seeks to overcome these patterns. It forces the reader to ask whether traditions of conformism can still be found at the time in which the text is actualized by its readers. *Was bleibt* depicts a society in the late 1970s that is paralyzed by and unable to break free from its historical link with Nazi totalitarianism, resulting in a disdainful attitude towards individuals as well as the need to create an ideological enemy, which in turn led to loss of self within a totalitarian system, and its attendant conformism and compelled obedience (Cosentino 112). These remnants are due to a deficient *Aufarbeitungsarbeit* (working through) regarding the Nazi era, which the narrator calls “Reste, die sich sogar bis auf unsere Tage hinübergertettet haben” (WB 27). Read in the context of the 1990s, Wolf seems to raise the question of appropriate *Aufarbeitungsarbeit* anew; however now the question arises in the context of GDR commemoration. She shows that the end of the East German state warrants a new assessment of the totalitarian past in general.

Already in *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf sought to understand herself and her society in the larger historical fabric of totalitarian thinking: "Mit dem Versuch, die innere Entwicklung eines Menschen durch die Verbindung mit der Geschichte zum Muster von etwas Typischem zu machen, wird auch die quälendste der Fragen...mitgestellt, die Frage der eigenen Schuld in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus" (Grove 32). The act of extrapolating "typicalities" reveals another disturbing pattern. Her inquiry cannot avoid looking into reasons behind the abrupt and apparently effortless transition from one ideological society to another. How could individuals who seemingly opposed a previous system of authoritative thinking devote their enthusiasm to a new cause that is equally authoritative in nature (Smith 158)?

Was bleibt continues to investigate questions of personal responsibility vis-à-vis historical processes, not by blaming her historical circumstances (such as her upbringing in Nazi Germany and her socialization in communist East Germany), but by conceptualizing history in its comparability, emphasizing the applicability of one's own experiences to a broader understanding of the self in time. Not historiography but literature in its ability to trace and communicate memories and to anticipate future change is at the forefront of all commemorative endeavors. Wolf writes: "Die Zeit...gibt jeder, besonders aber dieser Periode unserer Geschichte [des Faschismus] fortlaufend eine neue Dimension...Der Sachverhalt, der sich mir als Stoff anbietet [ist] die Struktur der Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart...Die Literatur hat dem Vorgang nachzugehen, was heißen kann: ihm voranzugehen (*Die Dimension des Autors* 785-92).

Read in the context of 1979, *Was bleibt* articulates serious doubt about its own ability and ultimately literature's ability to comply with the demands as formulated above. The text becomes a historical document of this time period, since the narrator gradually realizes that (similar to the Cassandra's vain warnings of the immanent downfall of Troy in Wolf's homonymous novel)

socialist society cannot be saved and the utopian hope for a societal transformation in the future is a lost cause. This awareness and the insufficiencies of language to name the causes for this failure explicitly result in a *Sprachkrise* (crisis of language) that is intrinsically coupled with a profound identity crisis. Throughout the text, the narrator experiences a *Sprachverlust* (loss of language), which also implies a profound *Selbstverlust* (loss of self). The inability to speak as “[e]ine der wichtigsten Voraussetzungen für das Entstehen von Literatur,” as Wolf writes, “ist aber die Sehnsucht nach Selbstverwirklichung” that causes a “Zwang des Aufschreibens als vielleicht einzige Möglichkeit des Autors, sich nicht zu verfehlen” (*Die Dimension des Autors* 489).

The oppressive experience of being under state surveillance seems to close in on the narrator, hampering her ability to write and thus to live. The paratactic staccato of her sentences underscores this fear even more: “Jetzt waren wir soweit. Ich konnte nichts mehr tun. Kaltgestellt nennt man das. Mit dem Rücken zur Wand...Nichts geht mehr. Von allen guten Geistern verlassen...Die Weichen waren gestellt” (WB 90-91). This fear makes her question whether she will ever be able to anticipate a “new language” or if she would find it at all. She relegates her quest for a “new language” to the subjunctive mode - not in the future mode - when she says at the beginning of the text: “Würde ich meine Sprache je finden?” (7).

The *Sprachkrise*, however, resolves itself very differently when *Was bleibt* is read as a historical document in the context of 1979 (when it was written) and as anticipatory text in 1990 (when it was published). The drastic political changes of 1989/1990 allow for two highly different readings of the text and especially the text’s conclusion. In the context of its creation in the late 1970s, the reader must acknowledge that the end of *Was bleibt* is a kind of prosaic ‘da capo’: the narrator - and probably Wolf herself - seems to be thrown back to the beginning of her

own text and back to an inability to express her experiences in a “new language.” This infinite cycle always defies the possibility for the actual beginning of the narrator’s (continuously postponed) attempt: “Sollte ich mich nicht einfach hinsetzen an diesen Tisch, den Stift nehmen und anfangen. Was bleibt. Was meiner Stadt zugrunde liegt und woran sie zugrunde geht” (93).

The radical political changes around the time when the text was published, however, necessitates a different reading of *Was bleibt*. The text not only describes what was once anticipated and what has now become a fact: the end of the socialist state. It also marks the beginning of a difficult process of memory work in and through literature that is - in the context of 1990 - imbued with the hope to chart out a more developed stage for socialism. *Was bleibt* advocates for a socialist alternative in a present that is not yet evident. The political circumstances seem to herald the point that the narrator had anticipated and which she had continually pushed off: “Eines Tages,” she writes “in meiner neuen Sprache,...werde ich sprechen können, ganz leicht und frei” (93). Wolf’s decision to publish the text in 1990 reveals her optimism to anticipate a future in which a socialist alternative is a part of a future horizon, of a ‘not-yet’ in the present. The author Wolf almost seems to enter into dialogue with her own doubtful narrator of *Was bleibt*. When the narrator states “Es ist noch zu früh,” she seems to answer: “...aber es ist nicht immer zu früh” (93).

It is important to stress once more that Wolf revised *Was bleibt* in the fall of 1989 and prepared it for publication when she experienced “[einen] Augenblick reinen Glücks” (*Reden im Herbst* 11) upon the news that the people’s growing protest and demands for social and political change gained more and more momentum and took place without bloodshed. If we position *Was bleibt* in this short timeframe, it is unavoidable to interpret the text’s plea for a “new language” within the well-defined parameters of socialist thinking. It does not project a new future beyond

a socialist ideological framework. Instead, it views the crisis of the GDR (which will soon lead to its end) as a historical threshold that demarcates the end and the beginning of a new stage of socialist development in a changed political setting. The text suggests that the previous socialist project as it has existed in the GDR had come to an end due to political failures and individual shortcomings. In an interview with Aefke Steenhuis shortly after Germany's unification, Wolf states:

Der Zusammenbruch war unaufhaltsam. Es war lange schon klar, dass eine falsche, schädliche, längst überholte Politik mit Macht erhalten werden sollte...Das ließen sich die Menschen nicht mehr gefallen. Die Angst hörte auf. (*Reden im Herbst* 134).

The new spirit that had politicized the people and made them fearless revealed a humanity on the brink of a new socialist era that fueled the hope of for a revolutionary renewal that would bring a true "Volksherrschaft" to fruition (Wolf, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* 11).

The text contains many clues that one day this secretly held hope will come true. The narrator believes that she will be able to articulate a new future in "jener anderen Sprache, die ich im Ohr, aber noch nicht auf der Zunge habe" (WB 7). Wolf/the narrator anticipates this new future together with her dear readership, which she considers the backbone of a new socialist era. At the night of the public book reading in *Was bleibt*, she acknowledges the "Wunder" that people were still speaking of "Brüderlichkeit" and that they showed concern "auf welche Weise aus dieser Gegenwart für uns und unsere Kinder eine lebbare Zukunft herasuwachsen soll" (83).

In addition to her literary texts, Wolf's political engagement at the time reveals how much she believed in "diese unglaubliche Wandlungen," (*Reden im Herbst* 121) which yielded the hope that a new socialist society - democratic and humanistic in nature - would arise from the ruins of the former GDR. And yet, when her text was published, she must have realized that the anticipated "sozialistische Alternative zur Bundesrepublik" (171) was a grave misjudgment of

the political reality. Her *Aufruf für unser Land*, in which she advocated the “revolutionäre Erneuerung” and warned against “den Ausverkauf materieller und moralischer Werte” seemed in retrospect naïve and completely out of touch with the wishes of the majority of GDR citizens and her own readers (15). Over a period of many months and especially during the *Literturstreit*, Wolf found herself in a phase of a “verzweifelte Gratwanderung” (124), which seemed to necessitate both a radical reckoning with the GDR past and a defense of “bestimmte ideelle Werte, [die unter den] bestimmten Machtstrukturen nicht in Erscheinung treten konnten” (143).

Was bleibt speaks to this struggle. It pinpoints the oppressive structure of a society that had been forced into a totalitarian system far removed from the desired and, in her ego, still valid socialist idea. It also negotiates as a kind of “Selbstverständigungstext” (Huysen, *Das Versagen der deutschen Intellektuellen* 85) the role of the individual - its responsibilities, delusions, and failures - in the realization of a “menschengemäße Gesellschaft,” as she would later characterize it in *Stadt der Engel* (82). *Was bleibt* and the other novellas soon to come (*Wüstenfahrt* of 1999, *Leibhaftig* of 2002, *Ein Tag im Jahr* of 2003) neither suffice as Wolf’s central piece on GDR and personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, nor did she ever claim to undertake this endeavor. Her final novel *Stadt der Engel* or *The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* was expected to accomplish this difficult task. Her readers expected a continuation of the discussion as to how a society can anticipate a better future in the present. Literary critic William Rey tellingly summarizes Christa Wolf’s paths, which seem to necessitate a final literary and personal reckoning with her past in the form of her last novel:

So führt die Kurve dieses dramatischen schöpferischen Lebens zurück zu ihrem Ausgangspunkt...Der naïve Idealismus der jungen Schriftstellerin...erlebt eine Kette von Enttäuschungen, die sie der Verzweiflung nahe bringen. Dann ereignet sich der lange erwartete Aufschwung, der eine Episode bleibt und mit einem jähen Absturz endet. Christa Wolf wird nicht in den Untergang der DDR hineingezogen. Sie überlebt die

Katastrophe und fühlt sich dazu berufen, ihre Geschichte zu schreiben - eine Geschichte, die über die Trümmer hinweg den Blick auf die Zukunft [freigeben soll]. (273)

2.3 WORKING THROUGH A FORGOTTEN PAST AS WILLFUL ACT OF SELF-DESTRUCTION AND ICH-WERDUNG: WOLF'S *STADT DER ENGEL ODER THE OVERCOAT OF DR. FREUD*

Christa Wolf was eighty-one years old when she presented her last novel at the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin of June 2010. Many expected *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* to be an all-encompassing literary contribution to GDR *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and a very personal document alike. Towards the end of her life and nearing the end of her writing career, Wolf still had the status of “öffentliche Instanz” (Knipphals). The drastic changes within the literary system and the critique of Wolf during the *Literaturstreit* in the early 1990s had neither diminished her literary importance nor questioned her significance as a public intellectual. Knowing that Wolf's literary contribution to issues of political, social, and cultural importance could be found largely in her prose writings, her audience hoped that this novel would provide “einen differenzierten, alle Umstände berücksichtigenden Umgang mit der DDR Vergangenheit” (Knipphals). The hope for “a complete reckoning with the GDR past that took into account all circumstances,” as the newspaper phrased it, testified to the eagerness of her audience and critics alike to find out if and how the novel dealt with what Wolf had called the most difficult weeks in her life and what she had never addressed in her writing up to this point: the disclosure of her involvement with the *Stasi* in 1993 (Vinke 142).

During the period of reorientation in the years after the fall of the wall, the main focus of GDR memory was the examination of structures and mentalities that had helped bolster the

authoritarian regime. The question of culpable behavior and moral deficiencies dominated the discussion and witnessed daily revelations - some more scandalous than others - about secret cooperation between the former *Stasi* and politicians, authors, actors, and other public figures from both East and West Germany. In January 1993, Christa Wolf made the news when she came forward and publically admitted that she had not only been a victim of *Stasi* surveillance but was herself registered as an informal member of the *Stasi* (*IM*) from 1959 until 1962. Unlike similar confessions regarding secret memberships, willful cooperation, or acquiescent behavior in declared criminal regimes (i.e. novelist and Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass' *Waffen-SS* membership), the discussion about Wolf's *IM* activity was additionally spurred by her explanation - not excuse - that she had completely forgotten about this incident. In her public statement Wolf writes: "Ich fand bei [denen über mich angelegten Opferakten] auch ein dünnes Faszikel, aus dem ich erfuhr, dass die Stasi mich...als 'IM' geführt hat. Das traf mich völlig unvorbereitet...Ich erhielt einen Decknamen, woran ich keine Erinnerung habe" ("Eine Auskunft"). This was her first attempt to explain why she had neither addressed the existence of her "Stasi-Täterakte" (*Stadt der Engel* 186, henceforth SdE) in previous literary works, nor spoken of this past before the archives were made accessible to the public. *Stadt der Engel* thus promised to strike a delicate balance between a general assessment of the GDR past and a personal account of failure, shame, and even guilt.

Compared with other tendentious memoirs from the immediate post-wall period that aimed to come to terms with the GDR past and to address the question of personal guilt, Wolf's *Stadt der Engel* stands out as unique. The immediate post-wall era has seen many autobiographies of former GDR authors in which they reflect on the relationship between author and regime and the nature of writing under challenging conditions. Despite the difficult question

about the extent to which authors who stayed in the GDR and were not blacklisted supported an oppressive regime through their writing, most of these autobiographies are excusatory in nature. Hermann Kant's *Abspann. Erinnerung an meine Gegenwart* (1991), Günter de Bruyn's *Zwischenbilanz: Eine Jugend in Berlin* (1992), and Heiner Müller's *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (1992) are fitting examples for writers who retrospectively attempt to save their reputations by either remaining silent (de Bruyn), by sugarcoating any involvement with the *Stasi* (Kant), or by justifying the need to work with the regime (Müller).

Wolf, by contrast, responded differently to the need to give an account of herself as author and public figure in an authoritarian regime, albeit almost two decades later than her colleagues. The painful experience of becoming the scapegoat for all GDR writers during the *Literaturstreit* debate certainly suggests pragmatic reasons to let some time pass before beginning the process of self-reflection and the critical assessment of her past. More importantly, however, Wolf seemed to approach *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* differently. Instead of attempting to 'master' the past (*bewältigen*), Wolf strives to work through her past (*Aufarbeitung, Auseinandersetzung, Durcharbeiten*), not for the sake of leaving it behind, but to make it a meaningful part of her present life. This approach aligns her closely with Adorno's understanding and criticism of coming to terms with the Nazi past in West German society of the late 1950s.

Adorno's famous essay from 1959, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?," exposes the West German difficulties to face the Nazi past and to take full responsibility for the Hitler atrocities. In willfully effacing painful memories of the NS-past in order to deflect guilt or responsibility, Adorno maintains, West German society endangered its fragile democratic system by allowing old fascist sentiments to persist. Wolf acknowledges her own suppression of painful

memories from her own *Stasi* past as equally threatening to her identity. At the same time, she makes her personal example a case in point for the immediate challenges to form a democratic society after Germany's unification. When the narrator of *Stadt der Engel* wonders how she could have forgotten about her time as informal *Stasi* member, Wolf is echoing Adorno's hypothesis that forgetting reveals first and foremost the desire to turn the page of one's past. Since individual remembering is always performed in a larger (socio-cultural) context, Wolf acknowledges that *Auseinandersetzung* also needs to examine societal and cultural structures that allow for certain memories to surface and for others to be suppressed or 'forgotten.' This is to say, forgetting for Wolf becomes more or less a conscious and unconscious use of selective memory. Akin to Adorno's plea to engage in an act of critical self-reflection and painful confrontation with the past, Wolf performs the act *Auseinandersetzung* by literarily taking apart the past as an act of taking apart the self. The subsequent process of mnemonic self-exploration challenges the essence of the narrating self to the core. This self-destruction, however, becomes a necessary means to recognize and ultimately to overcome what Sigmund Freud called *Verdrängungswiderstände* (suppression resistance), thus enabling her to make the past a conscious part of her present self. While Adorno sees political immaturity of the FRG as the main cause for such *Verdrängungswiderstände*, Wolf examines both internal and external, that is psychological and socio-cultural, reasons for her forgetting (and subsequent remembering). Thus, the novel bridges the gap between individual and collective remembrance. *Stadt der Engel* does not anticipate a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* but instead emphasizes the importance of newly assessing and inscribing *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*. And this process defines anew the ever-changing relationship between the remembering self and the commemorating collective to the past.

Interestingly, Wolf chooses the novel to transform her personal experiences and, thereby, to establish a link between individual and collective remembering. This decision caused some confusion among her readers and critics. An autobiography seemed more fitting for communicating personal memories. Considering the long-anticipated revelation about Wolf's brief *IM* activity, many reviewers seemed confused that Wolf goes out of her way to let her readers know her text is not autobiographical. An immediate disclaimer stresses that it is a work of pure fiction, although it features a Wolf-like character that is said to be the author of a book called *Kassandra* and another one whose content and reception sound indistinguishable from those of *Was bleibt* (SdE 230). Hence, many concluded that the novel's designation as fiction and not autobiographical might be little more than an escape clause, exculpating the author from having to stand behind her work or to avoid personal and moral judgment (Gallagher 381).

Such hasty conclusions about Wolf's intentions, however, turn a blind eye to the specificities of the discussion about genre in general. The difficulty of assigning Wolf's prose to a specific genre has a long history. For example, during the *Literaturstreit*, her text *Was bleibt* - explicitly labeled as novella - was accused of the exact opposite: Wolf's critics wanted to read the text explicitly as autobiographical in order to prove that she tried to gain the status of a *Stasi* victim after the fall of the Wall. In *Stadt der Engel*, her first-person narrator evokes biographical elements of Wolf's life even more, making fact and fiction almost indistinguishable for the reader.

The difficulty in assigning a particular genre to *Stadt der Engel* shows that Wolf's text tries to free itself from rigid categorizations. Autobiography in particular has produced a long history of philosophical and linguistic reflections about the difficulty for language as "a medium to represent another medium - being" (Barthes 21). Michel Foucault pushed the discussion to a

point where the importance of an author and his intentions vanishes behind the notion of an author as a function of discourse (Foucault 124). In order to address the inevitable problem of “comingling elements of fact and fiction [in order to bridge] the ever-present ontological gap between the self who is writing and the self-reflexive protagonist of the [autobiographical] work” (Rankin 309), a new emphasis and area for the study of predominantly female autobiographies has brought further attention to the subgenre of autobiographical fiction. According to the *Encyclopedia of Women’s Autobiography*, it is defined as genre in which an author fictionalizes portions of her life and presents it as a novel. In this type of writing, the life of the writer and narrator are so closely intertwined that very little distinction can be made between the two (Boynton).

The copious references to the author Christa Wolf and her works bespeaks Wolf’s typical deployment of subjective authenticity as a literary device to blur the lines between her narrators and herself in order to communicate her personal experiences through fictional writing. The process of such writing evokes continuous reflections on the self at different points in time and promises to provide deeper insights into the true self. Understanding this true self implies the hope to communicate the “truth” about the relationship and interdependency between self and world in order to depict mankind (more generally and objectively) in differing temporal and social situations. Her text thus echoes what Goethe had already achieved with his “erzählende Autobiographie” (Lehmann 139) *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1808-1831). Goethe provided not only an autobiography but also an important aesthetic program that facilitated a process of “eigene Erkenntnisentwicklung” both within the author and its readers (142). The notion of a literary *nosce te ipsum* (“know thyself”) becomes viable through a productive interplay between self and world. An autobiography is thus not a mere description of

an individual's life but an analysis of the condition in which it operates. Goethe writes: "Der Mensch kennt nur sich selbst, insofern er die Welt kennt, die er nur in sich und sich nur in ihr gewahr wird" (Gedenkausgabe Bd. 16, 880).

Like *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Wolf's text merges truth and fiction in a narrating synthesis in order to generate both a poetic articulation of "Symbole eines Menschenlebens" and a historical document "in dem Sinne, dass [es] Tendenzen artikuliert, die für eine bestimmte Phase gesellschaftlicher und kultureller Entwicklung charakteristisch [sind]" (Lehmann 145). For both Goethe and Wolf, in other words, memory and imagining the past self in the present are crucial for the "Bestreben das eigentliche Grundwahre [als] Resultate [des] Vergangene[n] hervor[zu]heben," as Goethe wrote in a letter to King Ludwig I. of Bavaria about the paradoxical title of his autobiography (Gedenkausgabe Bd. 11, 209). Wolf resolves the paradox of her own "autobiographical novel" by employing a splintered identity that continually obscures the connection between the author and created self. The novel thus features a Wolf-like person in the form of a female first-person narrator who - like Wolf at the time - issues a public statement about her IM activity during a nine-month research stay in Santa Monica, California. This confession initiates an intense introspection that configures memory and identity by drawing on both the remembered and the forgotten aspects of her life. The need to understand how she could have forgotten about this shameful aspect of her past becomes the core task of the novel.

The anticipatory nature of Wolf's earlier *Was bleibt* is reversed in *Stadt der Engel*. Here, the narrator is forced to revisit a past that she claims to have forgotten entirely: "IM stand da, ich habe es nicht glauben wollen....Katastrophenalarm, Fluchtreflexe, gerne wäre ich gelaufen bis an den Rand der Welt" (SdE 202). Early in the text, however, she admits that "vom Ende her erzählen," that is, to reconstruct a past self in the present via excavated memories, runs the risk

“sich unwissender zu stellen, als man ist” (28). Consequently, her repeated wonder *that* she had forgotten about her past as *IM* (196, 202, 205, 214, 291) soon turns into the pressing question *how* she could have forgotten about it. Neither her contemplations about the human brain and its ability to surrender “[m]anche Einsicht [dem] Meer des Vergessens” (61) nor excusatory explanations uttered by others (202, 205, 286) protect her from realizing that a process of “schonungslose Selbsterkenntnis” (99) requires that she take off the protective overcoat of Dr. Freud. She states: “Ich will mich erinnern” (249).

In order to initiate remembering, Wolf applies the principle of splitting the self into many narrating voices. This allows her to create narrative gaps that foster deeper reflections about the self and the respective timeframes through which the text conceptualizes it. While in *Was bleibt* the splitting of the narrating self aimed at the anticipation of a future self that would later remember it, *Stadt der Engel* introduces three narrative voices in order to make accessible both a remembered and a forgotten past. These voices operate according to the following three principles: 1) The *writing-I* is the I of the present that reflects upon the events in the process of writing them down. It functions like a projection screen upon which the other voices come into view and allow us to observe how the engagement with the past (and especially the unearthing of hitherto absent memories) alter the writing-I. 2) The *remembered-I* is the past voice that is situated in the early 1990s, when the narrator’s *IM* activity was revealed to the public. As the events of her *Stasi* revelation unfold, the *remembered-I* is depicted as a negotiating medium between what the narrator remembers of this past and what aspects she had allegedly forgotten. For the reader, the *remembered-I* makes accessible the climate of a time period and also depicts the events in light of the urgent need for political and cultural reorientation in the early 1990s. 3) The *remembering-I* speaks whenever the narrator excavates an alleged forgotten memory of her

past. The remembering-I enables the writing-I to decipher interior *Verdrängungswiderstände* and thereby exposes an inherent link between psychological mechanisms of remembering/forgetting and the external (political, cultural, ideological) factors that stimulate or inhibit remembering. Thus, the threefold self creates a resonating body of multiple voices that permeate each other. This interplay of voices reveals memory as both self-referential and reciprocal in its relationship to the collective. Wolf's method of presenting a narrating self that is in constant dialogue with itself and its environment effectively opens fixed structures, such as past and present, the remembered and the forgotten, truth and fiction, cause and effect (Rankin 314). Her text thus gives rise to an understanding of memory as a process in which the past assumes different meanings and is reshaped and conceptualized differently according to present needs.

Freud's overcoat is a recurring motif in this novel, where it has a dual function. It promises to provide "eine warme Schutzhülle [in] jeder Lebenssituation" (SdE 155) and alludes to Freud's "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten" (1914). Only at first glance does the overcoat provide a protective cover, shielding Wolf's protagonist from memories that resurface. However, the overcoat also functions as the painful reminder of a past that the protagonist wants to forget: "Wollte ich diesen Mantel etwa wieder loswerden? Damit er...mich nicht jeden Tag an bestimmte Dinge erinnern konnte, die ich lieber vergessen wollte?" (SdE 177). In this context, Wolf's narrator underscores that no outside force can reveal a person's willful forgetting. Rather, the resurfacing of suppressed memories occurs independently, as "Erinnerungen, [die] sich nicht mehr aufhalten [lassen]" (162). The text almost never asks for external reasons why the past could have been "forgotten" and mentions only briefly, and then through the voice of others, that German society would ascribe "den höchsten Grad der Schuld" to informal *Stasi* members (178) and launches a ruthless witch-hunt (203). More importantly, *Stadt der Engel* seeks to explore

Verdrängungswiderstände, providing the key for “all of what is essential” in the process of excavating willfully forgotten memories and coming to know the true self (Freud 147-48). With the laconic statement “Meine Akte [testifying to her *IM* activity] war den Medien übergeben worden” (SdE 177), Wolf’s protagonist is only granted a little time “to become more conversant with this resistance with which [she] has now become acquainted, to work through it, [and] to overcome it” (Freud 155).

In the process of writing about this time, the writing-I accomplishes what Freud defined as crucial for the overcoming and final reconciliation with one’s past, that is, to find the courage to direct attention to one’s “illness” (the suppressed past). As a result, the writing-I no longer sees its past as contemptible, but as a worthy enemy, and, most importantly, as a piece of itself (Freud 152). Remembering thus puts the remembering-I in Wolf’s text in danger. The confrontation with a remembered-I, an inner enemy that is addressed in the second person singular with “du” in the text, is akin to Freud’s notion of repeating and acting-out one’s past in the present that makes the past experiences “as something real and contemporary” (152). As the past reaches into the present and literally grasps at the remembering-I (SdE 192), she realizes “dass [sie] in Gefahr war” (236). Feeling endangered cannot be explained with the guilty conscience that is commonly associated with accounts of collaboration in a totalitarian system. Quite to the contrary, the narrator is surprised about its lack: “Komisch, dass ich mich nicht schuldig fühle” (281). Furthermore, the feeling of danger cannot be traced, as literary scholar Kaleen Gallagher has argued, to a crisis of deeply rooted shame. Certainly, the protagonist admits, “Ich schäme mich” (SdE 217), but this does not explain the “oscillation between revelation and concealment throughout the rest of the text through an allusive - and elusive - style which manages to suggest truthfulness and retreat from it at the same time” (Gallagher

390). Gallagher views this kind of “‘Geheimnistuerei’... as the result of an understandable desire to protect oneself from prying eyes,” but she also sees the main cause for the narrator’s vagueness as “an attempt to direct the reader’s attention away from oneself and onto a more general plane, or simply a desire to hide the ‘whole truth’” (391).

The suspicion about the narrator’s reluctance to reveal more about the three years of her *IM* activity arises because she primarily focuses on the question of how she could have forgotten about the episode. However, discovering the whole truth of her past means to find out “wie ich damals war” (SdE 257). Drawing on her expertise about remembering and memory (202), she refuses to follow the advice of a friend and psychologist who claims that forgetting is a necessary means for survival (205), which excuses her moral misconduct. The reason why she refuses to accept this explanation is twofold: First, the protagonist assesses her personal and moral “guilt” by drawing on the minimal ramifications of her *Stasi* activity. She insists that she was not obligated to justify her actions back then (203) and that the meetings with the *Stasi* were in fact “in meiner Erinnerung unerheblich” (202). In Wolf’s case, the *Stasi* had ended their cooperation due to “überbetonte Vorsicht” and “größerer Zurückhaltung” on her part (Vinke 143). Likewise, her protagonist claims that the information about two colleagues that she passed on to the *Stasi* during her *IM* activity was insignificant, although she is well aware that outside forces will skin her alive (SdE 140) by passing down a “moralisches Todesurteil” (201) about her involvement.

Second, the narrator is not at all evasive when it comes to telling the whole truth about her *Stasi* activity. This evasiveness is, as Ulrike Growe convincingly argues, a means to avoid filling the forgotten episode in her life with retrospective imagination, which could result in the falsification of ‘true’ memories: “Unterliegt das Gedächtnis der Gefahr der Verfälschung, weil das, was erinnert wird, in der Rückschau verfremdet...werden kann, so ist das Vergessen, indem

es in der Gegenwart lediglich als ein Faktum registriert werden kann, von solchen Verfälschungen frei (48). It is Wolf's goal to understand the nature - i.e. the underlying pattern - of the past self that developed in a certain way and later forgot about its development. The narrator knows that being truthful means to engage in a "rückhaltloses Sprechen" (SdE 200) and to accept the great pain that comes with the "Fragwürdig-werden des eigenen Bewußtseins [und dem] Aufbrechen der [inneren] Einheit" (Grove 27). Confused about the severity of the protagonist's mnemonic self-exploration and subsequent self-condemnation, her friend Peter Gutmann appeals to her rationality: "Herrgott noch mal, hör auf!...Du hast doch niemandem geschadet!" By answering "Doch...Mir selbst" (SdE 307), the narrator acknowledges that a coming-to-terms with her forgotten past requires a willful act of self-destruction. By writing about "das Fremde in mir" (259), the narrator must harm and destroy the once known history of the self that had been valid thus far. She now is certain, however: "Wie es ist, bleibt es nicht, das war...gewiß" (258).

In her desire to find out the whole truth about her (narrating) self, Wolf echoes Walter Benjamin's image of unearthing memories, which he described in "Ausgraben und Erinnern." She states: "Ich steig noch mal runter in diesen Schacht" (SdE 205). Benjamin's words mark the beginning of the text and can thus be understood as the overall theme of Wolf's novel: "Wahrhafte Erinnerungen müssen viel weniger berichtend verfahren, als genau den Ort bezeichnen, an dem der Forscher ihrer habhaft wurde" (Benjamin 486). Remembering is a conscious process of digging up memories that come to constitute a 'true' self. The remembering-I will get a true picture of itself - an archeological *Denkbild* - when it begins to perceive itself in a "zusammenhängende Reihe von Ich-Leistungen, die aufeinander aufbauen"

(B. Greiner 334). The self is thus constituted as a continuous process of *Ich-Werdung* that defies its absolute situating with the unrepresentable historical whole.

While *Was bleibt* seeks to anticipate a future language, capable of narratively grasping the multiplicity of the past and present self, *Stadt der Engel* experiences the splitting of the self as “[den] argen Weg der Erkenntnis” (SdE 258). And this splitting, in turn, leads to a profound feeling of danger for the self. Revisiting the past requires acknowledging the foreign “piece of one’s personality [as] worthy enemy” (Freud 152). The act, “[m]einer eigenen Fremdheit nachzugehen,” (SdE 120) brings the narrator to the brink of self-destruction. The need to (narratively) destroy the *one* history of the self by retrospectively approaching the “blinde[n] Flecke, [die] im Zentrum unseres Bewußtseins sitzen...und nicht bemerkt werden” (48) requires the narrator to cut part of herself off from her own self. When Wolf writes in her earlier novel *Kindheitsmuster* “Wir trennen uns von uns und stellen uns fremd” (9), she still maintained the hope of being able to consolidate her present self with her past self through the act of writing. In *Stadt der Engel*, however, she is more aware of the dilemma of never fully grasping “[den] blinde[n] Fleck, [der] das Zentrum der Einsicht und der Erkenntnis überdeckt” (121). The very process of an *Ich-Werdung* is thus not merely jeopardized; it has become almost impossible: “Wer soll dieses Ich sein, das da berichtet. Es ist nicht nur, dass ich vieles Vergessen habe. Vielleicht ist es noch bedenklicher, dass ich nicht sicher bin, wer sich da erinnert. Eines von vielen Ichs...[Mit diesem] Schrecken leben wir doch alle: Dass wir uns nicht wiedererkennen” (214).

The text not only reveals the seemingly forgotten aspects of the narrator’s past to be “blinde Flecken” that continue to exist as “Gewaltakte gegen sich selbst in der Geschichte seiner Ich-Bildung” (B. Greiner 339). It also suggests that forgetting and suppressing are intrinsic to

how we *wish* to remember ourselves, as well as to what the socio-cultural context allows us to remember or forget. Both are pivotal factors in how the self constructs its history. In *Lesen und Schreiben*, Wolf uses the image of memory medallions, “[den] recht hübsch gemachten Kunstgewerbestücke[n],” which we present to ourselves and others as memories of our past. This highlights the artificiality and constructedness of memories within a socio-cultural context. The “Marktwert” of these medallions is high, she writes, “denn man muss viel vergessen und viel umdenken und umdeuten, ehe man sich immer und überall ins rechte Licht gerückt hat” (479).

With *Stadt der Engel*, Wolf challenges the willful constructedness of the self and the narrating subject. She forces the self to engage with hitherto unknown and unwelcome aspects of the (past) self and to face “[den] fremden Menschen, [der] mir da entgegen [blickt]” (SdE 270). Wolf makes her narrator go to the very core of her “Gefühlsgedächtnis” (43). And only this *Gefühlsgedächtnis* seems able to capture Wolf’s/the narrator’s tortured state of mind at a critical juncture - the moment she is forced to ponder her complicity, albeit largely harmless, with an authoritarian regime and the end of everything she once believed to be true.

The narrator acknowledges the paradox that is implied in the uncovering of these mnemonic blind spots: “Nun ist ja Schreiben ein Sich-Herananarbeiten an jene Grenzlinie, die das innerste Geheimnis um sich zieht und die zu verletzen, Selbstzerstörung bedeuten würde” (271). However, being able to free “[die den] Kern umgebenden, schwer einzugestehenden Tabus...von dem Verdikt des Unaussprechlichen” does not mean “Selbstzerstörung, sondern Selbsterlösung” (271). The “geheime Wissen, dass man sterben muss, um geboren zu werden” (Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* 521) is a dominant theme in Wolf’s texts. To destroy the writing self in order to survive draws on the intrinsic connectedness of being and writing that the narrator in *Stadt der Engel* characterizes as an “Ur-Wunsch...kenntlich zu sein, [sich] kenntlich machen durch

Schreiben" (SdE 290). For the author Wolf being and writing also signifies a personal coming-to-terms with oneself and her past. In an interview with Hans Kaufmann from 1972, she states: "Was erzählbar geworden ist, ist überwunden. Ich hatte nämlich erfahren - ich kann wohl sagen überraschend und gegen meinen eigenen beträchtlichen Widerstand -, was es bedeutet, erzählen zu müssen, um zu überwinden (Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben* 778).

Stadt der Engel depicts a narrating subject "das in den Tod des Ichs als Instanz des Bewußtseins zu gehen wagt, um eines Ichs willen, das seine Energie nicht in die Abwehr von Verdrängtem verbraucht, sondern lebendig und lebensfähig wird" (B. Greiner 358). The price to pay for this *Ich-Werdung* is high, but unavoidable. In the text, the narrator comes across a Thomas Mann's quote from a dairy entry, in which he ponders that "über alles bekennd zu schreiben, [ihn] zerstören würde." In response to these lines, the narrator is convinced: "Gar nicht darüber schreiben, hätte [Mann] erstickt...den Selbstversuch abbrechen, den es bedeutet zu schreiben...hätte ähnliche Folgen wie der Abbruch einer lebenserhaltenden Therapie" (SdE 233). The "unvermeidliche Schmerz" (272) that Wolf thoroughly scrutinizes in her novella *Leibhaftig* (2002) occurs on many levels in the novel: it is metaphorically expressed in the narrator's physical ailment, embodying the difficulties to reconcile with self-destruction and self-redemption (Costabile-Heming 208).

The experience of pain and suffering is also expressed on a formal level and made visible through the loose accumulation of episodic narrations, a pastiche of memory fragments, short aphorisms, intertextual references to other literary works, dreams, journal entries, songs, and letters. The disrupting of the actual text and the fracturing of its coherent structure is commented on when the writing-I realizes that she could - from the safe perspective of the writing I - "einfach [loslegen]...und ganz frei schreiben, was [sie] will" (SdE 40). Instead, she finds herself

confronted with the problem that “in dem Augenblick, in dem du soviel Abstand von deinem Schmerz hast, dass du darüber schreiben kannst, dieses Schreiben nicht mehr ganz authentisch ist” (286).

The inability to express the profound feeling of *Ich-Verlust* is coupled with the inability to express her experiences in a coherent narrative form. The fracturing of the text is the most noticeable when the narrator takes in an “Überdosis” (308) of hateful newspaper articles that have reached her from Germany. Still fighting against inner *Verdrängungswiderstände* in order to delay the fearful process of self-destruction, she blocks out all emotions and feels: “ich war tot” (237). Since the shutting down of emotions causes the “Gefühlsgedächtnis” (43) to halt, she has reached “die Grenze des Sagbaren” (Wolf, *Kindheismuster* 531). The narrator finds some relief from the demands of language in singing songs. Music offers her the chance to escape from the fixed contours of her own identity and to become aware of the diversity of unexplored possibilities within her (Smith 175). The truthful self-interrogation begins with temporal relaxation and reaches its peak when the narrator - again in a state of a “blackout” (SdE 365) - comes to an understanding: “Ich wußte nun, dass ich sterben musste...The overcoat of Dr. Freud hatte Risse bekommen” (335-36). In the novel, the complete dissolution of the narrating I coincides with the moment of her rebirth. The narrator has a dream-like experience of being fully enclosed by water. In the Christian sense, water as religious element for the holy sacrament of baptism, stands for spiritual rebirth. As one of the fundamental elements of nature, water stands for life, fluidity, and an ability to dissolve firm and hardened structures. Water signifies the changing “Wirklichkeit...[die] immer brüchiger [wird]” (SdE 367). In the novel, water marks the rebirth of the narrator, indicating her true *Ich-Werdung*. At the end of the novel, she reaches a spiritual “Wendepunkt” (367). The process of mnemonic self-exploration, the subsequent act of

self-destruction, and the eventual rebirth result in an “umfassendes, lebendiges, grenzenloses Ich, [das] Vertrauen in in [ein] neues Lebendigsein [hat]” (B. Greiner 346).

The narrator considers this new form of *Lebendigsein* her final “Genesung” (SdE 326). Wolf shifts the main focus from questions of moral deficiency, culpable behavior, and personal accountability towards the notion of healing, redemption, and forgiveness. It is important to note that healing, redemption, and forgiveness do not occur as results of a ‘mastered past,’ a past that is overcome and left behind, as the German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* suggests. Rather, healing, redemption, and forgiveness are bestowed from within exactly at a time when the narrator makes her past an intrinsic part of her present self. In the novel, redemption is not achieved by being forgiven. Instead of rehearsing feelings of guilt and moral culpability, redemption occurs rather as freeing her (narrating) self from the burden of the past and the dictate of memory. This is not an escapist move or a denial of moral responsibility towards her past (self). It is instead a highly critical approach to engage with her personal past through writing. Like Friedrich Nietzsche’s critical historian, Wolf’s narrator understands her past as being in the service of living. The “breaking” with her shameful past, that brings forgiveness and redemption, is achieved by condemning it and incorporating it into her present self, i.e. making the once forgotten past *selbstverständlich* (natural) and treating it as *fragloses Gegebensein* (unquestioned given) within herself. As such, forgetting acquires a new valence through literature. It comes close to fulfilling what Nietzsche maintains is only possible in death - a forgetting that releases the burden of the past but destroys individual life in the present:

Bringt endlich der Tod das ersehnte Vergessen, so unterschlägt er doch zugleich dabei die Gegenwart und das Dasein und drückt damit das Siegel auf jene Erkenntnis - daß Dasein nur ein ununterbrochenes Gewesensein ist, ein Ding, das davon lebt, sich selbst zu verneinen und zu verzehren, sich selbst zu widersprechen. (211)

Wolf stages “death” in and through literature. In her text, the splitting of the narrative voices brings the self to the brink of self-destruction, and, in doing so, leaves behind the notion of a “ununterbrochenes Gewesensein” for a new *Lebendigkeit* in the present, aiming at a happier existence in the future.

In *Stadt der Engel*, Wolf treats the mnemonic self-exploration that brought the narrator to the brink of self-destruction as a necessary part of charting out a meaningful relationship between the past and the present, the former and current self. Establishing and understanding meaningful *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* is the key concept for Wolf. She states: “Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen...[In] die Erinnerung drängt sich die Gegenwart” (*Kindheitsmuster* 9). Present needs trigger remembering and even force the unearthing of hitherto suppressed memories. The forming of meaningful relationships between the present and past thus becomes essential for true *Ich-Werdung*. Understanding the present (self) in light of its memories marks the beginning of (inner) healing, redemption and forgiveness, for Wolf a necessary basis from which a meaningful discourse about the (GDR) past can emerge.

2.4 CONCLUSION

In sum, the discussion about Wolf as GDR author and her two texts *Was bleibt* and *Stadt der Engel* highlight the importance of literature in charting out cultural memory. Literature and the works of Christa Wolf in particular are especially potent to show the nexus between individual and collective remembering. In her texts, the individual (the narrator, the writing-I) appears as memory bearer (the remembering-I, the remembered-I) and enters into a reciprocal relationship

with its socio-cultural context, in which shared notions of the past are negotiated, actualized, and maintained. The two texts allow us to discern Wolf's mode of remembering (i.e. the splitting of the narrating self for the sake of mnemonic self-exploration, the acknowledging of *Verdrängungswiderstände* that allows her to unearth suppressed memories, and the process of true *Ich-Werdung* by means of articulating a meaningful relationship to the past). They also make apparent the selectivity and perspectival aspects inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs. Wolf's texts monitor the socio-cultural environment in which the remembering self is constituted and cultural remembrance takes place. Both texts thus point out constituting forces for the making of cultural memory at two significant time periods in post-wall Germany. *Was bleibt* functions as critical commentary on the GDR past and examines - both as historical document and anticipatory text - the (missed) possibilities to redeem the utopian hope for a "menschengemäße Gesellschaft" as "realpolitische Alternative" (SdE 82). Furthermore, the text's content and reception are exemplary for a time period in which post-wall Germany felt the dire need for political and cultural reorientation. The heated discussion about Wolf's texts culminated in the *German-German Literaturstreit*. It showed that the drastic political changes in 1989 warranted a new historical assessment of the past, as well as a charting out of new commemorative undertakings. Wolf as *the* representative and cultural figurehead of the former GDR became the prime example in the discussion about the role of the leftist and liberal German intelligentsia in both the East and West. Her work, therefore, does not just represent individual versus collective memory. It is not just about her individual psyche in conflict over collective memory. It highlights the interdependence of individual and collective remembering.

Was bleibt asks for the consequences of the failed socialist project and what of its legacy will remain in the future. To anticipate these changes and to understand how a society might come to think of itself and its past are the most important themes in the work: “Nun standen die wirklichen Fragen im Raum, die, von denen wir leben und durch deren Entzug wir sterben können...Was bleibt” (WB 82-83).

Published two decades later, *Stadt der Engel* presents a new perspective on these questions and shows a different approach to GDR memory. The text is indicative of a time when literature and other cultural artifacts (such as films) provided the main platform to discuss questions of guilt, moral failures, and personal accountability for culpable behavior in the past. *Was bleibt* was discussed in various parts of German society and became relevant for the effort to chart a post-wall identity. It contributed significantly to the public deliberations on collective understanding of the shared past. *Stadt der Engel* is more concerned with the individual struggle toward a ‘true’ identity in light of hitherto suppressed memories. Wolf is interested in establishing meaningful connections to her own past, instead of communicating fixed images of the past to the greater public. Instead of mastering her past in order to overcome it, her text emphasizes the importance of examining critically our relationship to the past according to present knowledge and needs. Hence, her work assumes a more general meaning for our understanding of individual and cultural memory. When the past is communicated as *Vergangenheitsbeziehung*, it draws on the fluid process of negotiating anew how we understand ourselves (as individuals and as part of a greater collective) in relation to our past.

The following chapter investigates this aspect further. Examining a different medium of representation, the discussion turns to cinematic depictions of the GDR during two different time periods: Andreas Kleinert’s *Wege in die Nacht* of 1999 and Florian Henckel von

Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* of 2006. Both films are unique contributions to our understanding of how film engages with the past via visual images. They enrich the discussion about the GDR past by generating different modes of remembering. While literature was at the forefront of negotiating the status of GDR memory in the immediate post-wall period, film initially played a marginal role in the contemplations. This was mainly a matter of infrastructure (i.e. the dismantling of the East German film studios). It did not mean, however, that filmmakers had nothing to contribute to the assessment of past experiences in light of changing political, structural, and cultural circumstances. As the next chapter shows, film functioned, to the contrary, as important vehicle and expression of cultural memory. It emerged as powerful medium, able to provide different views on the GDR past and the commemorative efforts undertaken by the Berlin Republic.

3.0 THE GDR PAST IN FILM: HISTORY AS MNEMONIC EXPERIMENT

Despite the obvious relevance of post-unification films to the discussion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and GDR memory, films produced after the fall of the Berlin wall and Germany's unification have rarely been subject to an extended scholarly examination. In his pertinent volume *Screening the East*, Nick Hodgin identifies over eighty films that have been released since 1989 and most of them, he argues, remain fairly unknown (4-5). The majority of these films have received limited distribution and they have hardly been accessible to larger audiences. This made it difficult for these films to be recognized as important voices in the lively discussion about the GDR past, as had been the case with literature and Christa Wolf especially. Consequently, the nationally and internationally successful film *Das Leben der Anderen* by Florian Henckel von Donnersmark from 2006 drew new attention to film's potential to provide commemorative images of the past. Admittedly, *Das Leben der Anderen* was not the first film to engage with the GDR past. Other box-office hits such as *Go, Trabi Go* (1990), *Sonnenallee* (1999), and *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) dealt earlier with the memory of the defunct GDR state, and yet seemed to lack the necessary seriousness in approaching the delicate topic of GDR remembrance.

In the immediate post-wall years scholarly engagement regarding GDR film focused first and foremost on films produced by the state-owned film studios, the DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) (Schenk, Allan and Sandford, Naughton, Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, Pinkert). This trend is not surprising, if we consider that DEFA was largely unknown in the

former West, which resulted in a sudden fascination and curiosity with the East Germany's 46 year-old film production and distribution company (Berghahn, "East German Cinema" 79). Finally, a decade after Germany's unification, the focus slowly shifted towards a critical examination of post-wall German filmmaking. Of special interest were films that depicted the GDR past and responded to the legacy of the SED-regime. Additionally, films treating the political, societal, and cultural changes after Germany's unification received equally intense scholarly attention (Naughton, Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, Clarke, *German Cinema since Unification*, Halle, *German Film After Germany*, Hodgin).

Post-wall German films reveal a highly diverse angle from which filmmakers approach the GDR past and Germany's unification. Many films provide a social critical position from which to evaluate the past of the former East, ranging from inquiries into national identity (*Letztes aus der Da-Dae-R*, 1990), a (lost) socialist self-understanding (*Apfelbäume*, 1992), the notion of *Heimat* (homeland) (*Verlorene Landschaft*, 1992), the changing perception of community (*Herzprung*, 1992), and of course the debate about the oppressive, authoritarian SED-regime (*Verfehlung*, 1991). At the same time, we witness the distribution of films that refuse to taking a critical stand and seem to indulge in a nostalgic depiction of life in the former GDR (*Good Bye, Lenin!*, 2003). Other films merely focus on humorous aspects of the clash between West and East Germans or simply mock the 'backwardness' of East Germans and their struggle to adjust to post-wall life (*Go, Trabi Go*, 1990). Some critics claim that humorous and nostalgic films, in particular, which were released shortly after the fall of the wall, missed the opportunity to comment critically on the speed and nature of the unification process. In this context, film scholar Erich Rentschler generalizes that German film production at the time merely aimed at a "cinema of consensus" and remained unable to enrich the commemorative

discourse and catalyze change (263-64). Echoed in this somewhat harsh critique is, on the one hand, a longing for the past *auteurist* cinematic tradition and, on the other hand, the regret that despite their recovery of *auteurist* aesthetic values (mainly East German) filmmakers like Andreas Kleinert and especially Andreas Dresen were initially forced to remain at the margins of the popular cinematic landscape.

This chapter focuses explicitly on two very different contributions to the discussion of GDR remembrance in feature film: Andreas Kleinert's *Wege in die Nacht* (1999) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006). Both films are unique contributions to processes of (cinematic) representation of the GDR at two different points in time: 1999 and 2006.

In general, both *Wege in die Nacht* and *Das Leben der Anderen* are exemplary for a particular mode of commemorating the past that I call *mnemonic experiments* in contemporary historical film. Unlike other popular representations of history in film, which often tend to be action-driven and hero-oriented, they offer innovative and creative configurations of new filmic realities. To experiment with filmic (past and present) realities is a necessary means to question our self-understanding in relation to (past and present) time.

Considering the two films as a mnemonic experiment enables me to analyze the commemorative effect these films had in contemporary society. The two films contributed to cultural memory as they eschew verisimilitude or unassailable truth in film and rather draw on the historicity of the historical film. By solidifying, questioning, negating, or experimenting with certain views of the past, these films played active roles in the shaping of cultural memory. This is mainly due to the fact that the viewer is enlisted to approach the past in a new and different way. Both films remember the past by putting the viewer into a fictitious past (*Das Leben der*

Anderen) or a fictitious present that is imbued with the past (*Wege in die Nacht*). They then ask the spectator to rethink established notions of the past and negotiate new meanings in the present. We need to ask ourselves, then, how the two films experiment with the notion of history and ‘pastness’ on screen and what effect their mnemonic experiments had on the forming of cultural memory of the GDR past in contemporary Germany.

Kleinert’s film assumes the function of an afterword regarding films released in the first decade after Germany’s unification. It not only reflects fundamental issues that were being discussed during a period of reorientation in the 1990s. It also explores new strategies to continue the discussion about GDR remembrance in film and point it in a new direction. The film’s narrative is set in the post-wall era and investigates how unresolved issues from the GDR past continue to (negatively) effect the present. The film underscores that the political event of Germany’s unification, which marked the official end of the East German communist state, does not simply cut all ties to the GDR past, but instead necessitates the rethinking of our relationship to this past. *Wege in die Nacht* communicates the importance of the medium as a creative space in which unresolved conflicts from the past acquire new meaning in the present and thus underscore the film’s effect on the shaping of cultural memory.

The mechanism at work of shaping cultural memory in *Wege in die Nacht* is what I call an *elusive mode of remembrance*. The term *elusive* is not to be understood negatively. An *elusive mode of remembrance* designates the film’s reluctance to propose or even impose any concrete images of the past. Rather, *Wege in die Nacht* demands the viewer to engage in the process of negotiating images of the past instead of delivering pre-formed views of the past. This elusive mode intends viewers to scrutinize their personal perception of the past. Being able to discern how a vision came into being, enables the viewers to understand the mnemonic mechanisms at

play that inform the present. The awareness of how our view of the past continuously shapes the present and how modifications to this view might alter the present arises from the film's refusal to provide any solutions to the problems posed in the film. Rather than proposing a particular reading of the past, the film opens up many windows to look back to the past. It explores how we bestow new meanings on the past in the present. As will be discussed in more detail, the film employs the ruin as a central image for this process, highlighting further the dynamic notion of remembrance put forth in the film.

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's film *Das Leben der Anderen* was released in 2006. It focuses exclusively on one of the darkest aspects in GDR history: the oppressive nature of the *Ministry of State Security* (the *Stasi*). It is important to underscore that the film revisits *this* particular topic more than fifteen years after unification. It could therefore be seen as a throwback to the early 1990s, when the role of the *Stasi* was central to discussions of the East German State and we saw have seen in the discussion about Christa Wolf German public life was regularly punctuated with scandals about the collaboration of public figures with the *Stasi* (Cooke, "Introduction" 9). By the time the film was released, the discussion had shifted from the political and juridical to the realm of artistic appropriations of the past. The time that had elapsed between the fall of the wall and the mid-2000s allowed the topic to be channeled in artistic representations, and so to become subject to the creative articulation of cultural memory.

Das Leben der Anderen explores the possibility of being a good human being despite adverse (political) circumstances, a topic applicable to various historical scenarios, but of great significance for the democratic self-understanding of the Berlin Republic as the successor state to two authoritarian regimes. Hence, its contribution to the shaping of cultural memory of the

former GDR was substantial, and it attracted over 2.3 million viewers between 2006 and 2009 (filmportal.de).

The mechanism at work in shaping cultural memory in *Das Leben der Anderen* is what I call an *assertive mode of remembrance*. The film creates images that seek to represent the past as ‘truthfully’ as possible (and thus to pass for the first serious attempt to come to terms with the former East German state and its infamous Ministry for State Security). This attempt to deliver ‘true’ images of the state surveillance apparatus is mainly to be found in the film’s material details, including colors and props. The alleged claim for historical truth and authenticity is also employed in order to assert an idealistic scenario, which, however, blurs the boundaries between what is and what was historically possible and the imaginary.

The film’s plot enforces an employment of what film scholar Randall Halle has called the historical subjunctive (*German Film after Germany* 117). That is, it stages a ‘what if’ scenario that utilizes the notion of the oppressive surveillance state as historical context in order to probe, and ultimately to consolidate the idea of the transformability of a human being. The film’s dissemination of historical images becomes a means by which to reduce the complexity of the GDR past to the depiction of a defunct state, including - as the film maintains - its oppressive and inhuman ideology. *Das Leben der Anderen* positions itself in a trajectory of historical (and moral) progress, which only becomes possible by establishing a privileged position from which to judge the GDR past. It does not depict that past ‘as it was,’ however attempts to demonstrate ‘how wrong it was.’ The film’s significance for the process of forming cultural memory consists in solidifying its negative view of the GDR into a rigid commemorative image. Commemorating the GDR according to such pre-formulated images, however, exceeds the contemplative scenario of a ‘what if’ and stages, instead, the judgmental statement of a ‘what should have been.’

3.1 1990-1999: ANDREAS KLEINERT'S *WEGE IN DIE NACHT* AND THE FIRST DECADE OF FILMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GDR PAST

Andreas Kleinert's stylized art film *Wege in die Nacht* takes place in post-wall Berlin. The film's protagonist Walter Bergkamp is a former East German business manager in his mid-fifties who is now out of work. His former company fell prey to the privatization process in the immediate years after Germany's reunification and is now deserted and in ruins cinematically. Walter is closely aligned with these ruins, which come to resemble his inner turmoil. Walter is disoriented and simply lost in post-1990 society. His wife Sylvia provides some stability, since she is now the breadwinner for the couple. Walter's frustration and desperation is channeled outwards, making him believe that the new society is one of social and moral decay. Together with two teenagers, he makes it his task to return security and justice to his world. But, in this process, he gradually loses his grip on reality.

As self-proclaimed avenger of the meek and downtrodden, Walter resembles literary (and historical) figures such as Kleist's Michael Kohlhaas or Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen in his personal pursuit for justice. He and his gang aimlessly ride in Berlin's subways at night and brutally beat all those who seem to undermine the stability and structure of a society that Walter feels has ceased to exist after 1990. In the beginning, Walter himself never gets his hands dirty. Rene and Gina, the two teenagers - unemployed and equally disoriented - look up to him, intrigued by his vision of a better future. They become willing executors of his commands. The violence reaches its peak when Walter forces a young man to throw himself out of the car of a moving subway train. Triggered by this incident and the false feeling of regained power and authority, Walter becomes caught in a downward spiral of paranoia, violence, and crime. After robbing a jewelry store, he commits suicide at the site of his former company.

Andreas Kleinert belongs to a generation of filmmakers who were trained in the former East, but whose filmmaking career accelerated after the fall of the wall. This is primarily due to this generation's ability to adjust to the radical transformation of the cultural sphere and, as Halle calls it, the new "matrix of production" ("The Lives of Others" 62). In this new matrix, a few former DEFA filmmakers such as Dresen and Kleinert managed to find an entrée into well-established West German production support, while others vanished once "the system of production, the state-based methods of funding and distribution disappeared with the collapse of the GDR" (62-63). Kleinert graduated from the Konrad Wolf Film Academy in Babelsberg shortly before the fall of the wall, and it took little effort for him to shake off the label of an East German filmmaker. His new status paved the way for an uncensored and critical engagement with the social and moral issues of the GDR past and reunification (Berghahn, "East German Cinema" 86).

In order to understand the unique contribution of Kleinert's film to the discussion of GDR remembrance, we need to determine the basic trends of German feature film productions in the post-wall era of in the 1990s. Nick Hodgin's *Screening the East: Heim, Memory and Nostalgia in German Films since 1989* provides a valuable source for discerning the most noticeable tendencies in German film production after unification.

The immediate post-wall era witnessed a variety of commemorative approaches. The majority of the films released shortly after the fall of the wall focused on the first encounter between West and East Germans. These films drew on fixed stereotypes, ready-made for a humorous engagement with Germany's unification and depicted the 'clash' between West and East satirically. Films such *Go, Trabi Go* (1990), *Superstau* (1990), *Go, Trabi Go II. Das war der wilde Osten* (1992), or *Der Brocken* (1992) were highly successful and serve as good

examples of these banal comedies, which offered a playful reaction to the rapid changes. *Go, Trabi Go*, for example, achieved cult status and became the definite *Wende* film. The film, Hodgkin argues, was appealing for both Easterners and Westerners because director Timm managed to expose the inadequacy of Western stereotypes against East Germany, without, however, abandoning clichéd representations of the *Ossi*, the East German (39). More importantly, these light-hearted comedies fulfilled the need for a joyful and humorous take on the recent events. Not enough time had passed to assess the events in a more sober manner.

At the same time, the films were produced at the margins of the cinematic landscape, which carefully explored the socio-political developments after unification and began a first commemorative appraisal of the recent historical events. Andreas Kleinert's films were among them. Like *Herzprung* (1992) or *Stilles Land* (1992), Kleinert's first feature film *Verlorene Landschaft* (1992) also refused a humorous take on the encounter between East and West. Rather, all of these directors focused almost exclusively on the former East German landscape, that is the province, and investigate the dwindling sense of group identity in rural communities that are on the verge of extinction. The vanishing of communal solidarity, structure, and stability, permeated these films (Hodgin 65-72). These filmmakers captured early on the sense of loss that slowly prevailed over the initial wave of euphoria.

Following these dark accounts of a post-wall Eastern landscape, the mid-1990s witness the return of humor in post-unification films. But unlike the light-hearted comedies of the early post-wall period, films such as *Wir können auch anders* (1993), *Burning Life* (1994), *Not a Love Song* (1997), and *Bis zum Horizont und weiter* (1999) provide narratives of lighter disposition, without forgoing the critical examination of serious issues. Despite their gentle humor, these films closely attend to the continuing disparity between Easterners and Westerners and the

persistent notion of the East as a lost *Heimat* (Hodgin 102-17). However, the cinematic investigation of *Heimat* has undergone significant changes. Unlike earlier films, which focused on the provincial as either a haven from the struggles after unification or as *places non grata* on the verge of extinction, these films apply the motifs of travel and movement as a means of escape. Adhering to the Western filmmaking conventions of the road movie, their protagonists do not search for a new *Heimat* or community, but instead express the desire to be elsewhere. It is important to note that most of these films neither argue for an ‘elsewhere’ that is located within a German context, nor do they envision an utopian place that needs to be charted into a post-wall German landscape. Rather, the films’ protagonists travel to or envision places outside of the German context. The two brothers Kipp and Most in *Wir können auch anders*, for example, end up in a Russia village, while the heroine in *Burning Life* mentions Africa or Australia as a place to hide after the bank robbery.

At the end of the first decade after Germany’s unification, the depiction of the GDR past shifted towards a more critical engagement with the GDR past and the problems of the post-wall present. Both Kleinert and Dresen’s were at the forefront of rethinking commemorative approaches in film. Similar to Dresen’s *Nachtgestalten* (1998), Kleinert’s *Wege in die Nacht* is best suited to highlight the changing mode of remembering the past at the end of the decade. The film functions like a critical afterword that not only looks back at almost ten years of post-wall German film, but also provides an outlook on the future of German film production.

Despite its commemorative approach *Wege in die Nacht* has a resolute focus on the present. It is concerned with the need to cope with the uncertainties of a society in transition. Rather than presenting images of the past, Kleinert thus aims at the depiction of an individual and his attempts to restore some order to his lives in a post-wall urban society. At first glance,

Kleinert's outlook on the future is grim. His protagonist Walter is an anti-hero par excellence who is unable to resolve his conflicts and does not overcome his disorientation, despite his newly gained mobility. Grotesquely, his sense of mobility, freedom, and self-determination reinforces his stagnation and displacement. Walter travels at night in Berlin's subways. These two components - the darkness and the underground system - become tropes in the film for the individual's inability to adjust to the changed social and political circumstances. As the film's title already suggest, Walter remains in the dark - or *moves* even deeper into it - and has no prospect for a better future in a unified Germany. The *elusive mode* according to which Kleinert's film operates foregrounds the commemorative principle of focusing exclusively on the present. But this present is imbued by the past and, hence, attains a new level. Kleinert's film underscores that the need to move forward is intrinsically coupled with the demand to confront unresolved problems from the past in the present.

Walter's displacement is clearly observable throughout the film. Specifically, in numerous close-ups, he never occupies the center of the image but is marginalized either on the right or the left side of the camera frame. His wife Silvia, on the other hand, is presented in stark contrast to this displacement. Especially at her workplace, her presence in the center of the image suggests her confidence and successful adjustment to the new economic demands. Only later when Walter is on one of his security patrols with Gina and Rene, does a long shot on the group, riding down the subway escalator, place him in the center of the image. The two teenagers, one on his left and the other on the right frame him. Images of Walter like these depict Walter as more self-assured in two ways: first, the teenagers, who admire him and willingly execute his commands, seem to stabilize his crippled psyche. And second, his mission to restore order and

security harbors the illusion of getting him back on track and making him a valuable member of post-wall society.

It would be misleading to view Kleinert's film as yet another cinematic expression of pessimism about the social and political prospects of a unified Germany, however, even if the inevitable death of the protagonist could appear to symbolize this. It would also be inappropriate to interpret *Wege in die Nacht* solely from the standpoint of Eastern victimization. Certainly, the film thematizes some of the disputed topics of the unification process, such as the rapid privatization of the East German industry or the discrepancy in employment and salary in the two German states. And yet, Walter is not a character who simply assumes the role of a victim and whose violent behavior articulates post-wall trauma. A crucial principle of Kleinert's *elusive mode of remembrance*, in fact, is its refusal of the repetition compulsion as an explanation for Walter's dilemma. While Kleinert devotes much attention to Walter's pitiful struggle and self-identity crisis within a post-wall landscape of ruins, he does not retreat to ready-made explanations for his situation. That is, he refuses to excuse the protagonist's behavior by emphasizing Walter's role as a victim. Kleinert involves the viewer in the act of contemplating reasons for Walter's dilemma, which necessitates forging critical distance from Walter and not developing too much empathy for him.

One scene, in particular, exemplifies the lack of empathetic identification. On one of his trips in Berlin's subways, a ticket inspector approaches the group and casually greets Walter as "Genosse Bergkamp" (comrade Bergkamp), suddenly exposing him as a former business manager who was closely aligned with the SED party. The visual cues, which the viewer had received in earlier scenes of Walter's well-furnished dacha on a large piece of land, are now confirmed and leave no doubt about his privileged and prosperous position in the SED-regime.

The scene leaves no doubt that he is aware of his dubious past and it links him directly to the disgraced regime, although Walter gets up, pretends not to know him, and finally turns to the ticket inspector and says: “Sind Sie denn blöd? Hauen Sie ab, Mann!” This exposure causes Gina and Rene to revoke their respect, loyalty, and obedience. Unable to cope with the repeated loss of authority and power, Walter shoots Gina in the leg, which drives her away for good.

As a result of the disclosure of Walter’s past, his acts of violence and aggression cannot be explained (or even excused) by pointing to his individual circumstances. Conversely, his actions also articulate a misguided desire for power and authority, which not only concerns him as an individual but also affects others. Walter comes to embody the relics of the totalitarian power structure of the SED-regime that is still at work in post-wall society. Thus, Kleinert’s character gains a new, and more complex dimension: victim and culprit merge and become inseparable, making any rationalization of his dilemma even more convoluted.

In this *Wege in die Nacht* is unique in its approach to the past. Unlike other films of the first decade after unification, it neither sets out to scrutinize the unjust circumstances of the unification process, nor does it try to pinpoint the root of all evils in the inability of individuals to adapt to a new situation (although both of these factors play a role in the film). There are neither flashbacks of the time when Walter enjoyed his grand reputation in the GDR nor is that even indirectly referenced in the sparse dialogues. Without judging Walter for his past, the film reveals both the communist period and the unification process as crucial components for his ultimate failure. The film, however, insists also that the two are not the sole causes for his demise. They merely trigger symptomatic effects. While Walter’s experiences in the GDR and his post-wall present certainly provide the framework, the film scrutinizes and critiques the way

in which Walter operates *within* this framework, by showing meaning how he *responds* to these circumstances.

Thus, the dominant principle of the film's *elusive mode of remembrance* is expressed in the link Walter's relationship to his past as a means to adjust to the present. But *Wege in die Nacht* does not argue for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It does not anticipate a solution that involves mastering or overcoming the past. Instead, Walter needs to reconfigure his *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* in the present (which he ultimately fails to do). Accordingly, the *elusive mode of remembrance* requires a filmic strategy that abstains from depicting the past altogether and, so, set the process of rethinking relationships to the past into motion. The past is only present in the film insofar as it consistently imbues the present. The film seeks to depict the impenetrability of past time, which is devoid of meaning until it emerges from the present.

It is, therefore, not enough to argue, as some film scholars do, that Kleinert intends to "display a mental disposition" that reflects the "totalitarian power structures of the former GDR" (Berghahn, "East German Cinema" 93) and, ultimately, necessitates Walter's death at the end of the film as a form of artistic lustration regarding the past regime. Undoubtedly, *Wege in die Nacht* yields an immanent critique of the totalitarian East German past and examines the effect of authoritarian thinking in the present days. But Walter also certainly reverts to old and familiar patterns of his socialist past and thus regresses to former structures of power and authority. By doing so, moreover, he is caught up in his past and allows it to continue to inform the post-wall present. He, thus, clearly occupies a threshold between what is gone and what is now that prohibits him from moving in a clear direction, causing his emotional atrophy.

And yet, Walter's response to his present dilemma, which regresses to old patterns of behavior, is neither intended to reestablish the old (socialist) order. Nor does it bespeak his

fundamental nihilism. In fact, Walter is proactive in his effort to improve his situation. He fails to do so, however, since he cannot engage meaningfully with his past. This becomes apparent in his dialogue with Rene and Gina when they challenge him to reconsider his *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* by confronting him with his involvement with the SED party. Walter does not attempt to convince them of the usefulness of their mission by arguing for the ‘good old times’ in the former East, which he longs to reestablish. Instead, he draws on the future in a united Germany when he says: “Ich wollte euch doch aus dem Dreck holen. Es kommen bald andere Zeiten, bessere Zeiten und dann werden wir gebraucht.” Despite his ultimate failure to achieve his hope, Walter is future-oriented and not simply caught in nostalgic memories of bygone times or, to put it in Nietzschean terms, Walter defies a monumental or antiquarian view of history. He does not indulge in any false dreams of what has been lost after the fall of the wall, but actively seeks to envision and establish a better future. However, Walter does not seem to know how to free himself from concepts of the past that are deeply rooted in authoritative structures. This inability to pursue a meaningful relationship with the past undermines all efforts to move toward a better future.

Another crucial scene in *Wege in die Nacht* sheds more light on Walter’s response to the current circumstances. It also necessitates a more differentiated evaluation of his view of the socialist past and the post-wall present. The scene follows the incident that revealed Walter’s affiliation with high-ranking members of the SED party. Walter and Silvia are invited to the home of a man whom the film previously introduced as the ticket inspector on the subway and who greeted Walter as “Genosse Bergkamp.” Silvia arrives without Walter. The host leads her through the long hallway of the apartment in which a gathering of former GDR business owners, high-ranking party members, and other representatives of the former state takes place. Shifting

back and forth between point-of-view shots and close-ups on Silvia, the camera establishes a broad overview of Silvia's environment, while closely monitoring her facial expressions. As she arrives at the doorstep that leads to the large room where the gathering is taking place, the camera remains still and pans slowly from the left to the right without zooming in on a particular subject. Since the camera is meant to represent Silvia's gaze, the viewer concludes that she must be hesitating to enter the room. A close up on her face confirms that she is very uncomfortable and nervous. The subsequent point-of-view shot captures a room full of people who are standing or sitting in small groups around a long table that is filled with food, drinks, and silverware. We hear diegetic music in the background. The majority of people are males in business suits and slightly overweight. Most of them are smoking cigars and holding drinks in their hands. The entire room, an adjoining room, and the guests are in deep focus. This creates a mural-like effect, meaning that the room's activity (conversations and agents) is emphasized. The room appears crowded and dominated by these people and their amenities, accentuating even further the (social) displacement of the thin and modestly dressed Silvia. Silvia takes a seat to the side of the crowd, is marginalized in the left corner of the camera frame, and remains alone.

As the doorbell rings, the conversations and the diegetic music suddenly come to a halt. People's heads turn to the door, as if they expect something unusual to happen. After a few seconds of complete silence, the music resumes, and the conversations continue. This quick filmic *ritardando* - a truly unrealistic moment - indicates Walter's arrival, which cinematically forecasts the falling out between him and his former acquaintances. Reunited, the couple slowly walks through the room, and appears to join in the festivities. The following point-of-view shot, representing both Walter and Silvia's view, allows the spectator to catch bits and pieces of the conversations. People are talking about the economic situation and how well they have done for

themselves after unification. They brag about their successes at the stock market and the promising expansion of their businesses on the global markets. A close-up on Walter's face reveals his disgust. He is approached by a middle-aged man who addresses him as "Genosse Bergkamp" and asks how his company is doing after the Japanese investors took over. His euphoric speech leaves no doubt that he assumes that, in his view, Walter, too, has gained much from the changing economic environment after unification. Walter does not answer, however, turns away and walks up to a group of three men. One of them is advising the others to learn a lesson from someone who found his fortune in a flourishing company that has relocated to Los Angeles. As one of the men greets Walter "Guten Tag, Herr Genosse Bergkamp," he replies: "Es ist ja nicht zu ertragen, was Sie da reden. Haben Sie den überhaupt kein Gewissen? Opportunisten!" Walter then turns around, leaving the baffled men behind. As Silvia and he walk toward the camera and to the exit, the viewer observes that the men in the background have resumed their conversations. Just as quickly as the conversations and music resumed after the abrupt silence earlier when Walter rang the doorbell, his moral plea seems inept, with little effect on the others.

Unlike other films of the period such as *Burning Life*, for example, Kleinert avoids simply blaming the power of the FRG and the way unification was carried out for the inadequacies of the present. While there is a subtle critique of the capitalist West, uttered indirectly without being the explicit subject of the conversation, *Wege in die Nacht* predominantly examines how former Easterners adjusted to the new circumstances in light of their past. Instead of depicting the gap between East and West, the film argues that reconceptualizing one's relationship to the past is key for understanding the present and adjusting to it. In the party scene, it becomes apparent that Walter does not identify with his

former comrades anymore and can even assume the role of a moral judge. He has altered his relation to the past to a certain degree. Unlike the Stasi officer Gerd Wiesler in *Das Leben der Anderen*, however, he does not accuse former comrades of betraying the socialist idea. Nor does his behavior speak to a mournful view of the vanished (socialist) past. Rather, Walter laments that the others are ruthlessly seeking their fortunes in the post-wall era, without paying attention to the general decay in the post-wall society. They seem to have willfully forgotten their pasts and Walter highlights the need to change the present conditions.

Yet, Walter also fails to understand that the present dilemma has mainly been triggered by an unresolved past that continues to imbue the present. Even though he does not reveal his personal hardships to the other guests in this scene, the film, especially through the camera work, clearly situates Walter in opposition to his former comrades, even if they all face the same dilemma. Both, that is, are unable to better the present, since they all failed to engage meaningfully with the recent past. Their respective strategies to cope with the changing conditions after the fall of the wall might be different. But the effect remains the same: neither Walter nor his former comrades are able to envision an ethical future under post-wall conditions.

We have to ask, then, what cues the film provides to initiate meaningful engagement with the past. Both the willful forgetting of materialistic opportunists and Walter's self-destructive attempt to better the present simply rehearsing the past are depicted as failed responses to present circumstances.

Wege in die Nacht refuses to present its viewer with a pre-formed version of the GDR past and, by doing so, it challenges viewers to engage in the process of bestowing meaning themselves. When memory is perceived in such dynamic and vibrant terms, it becomes formable. The viewer neither watches Walter's actions passively nor does his suicide at the end close the

chapter on the problems posed in the film. In fact, the suicide underscores the unsettling feeling of inconclusiveness. By not providing solutions to Walter's conflict, the film prompts the viewer to engage in the discussion about how post-wall society can evaluate the GDR past, or what place GDR memories can occupy in a unified Germany, or how it continues to inform the present. The film demands of the viewers to probe their own perceptions and memories of the GDR past. By initiating this reflexive mode, it draws attention to the working of memories, or how they come into being and maintained through a variety of forms of cultural media.

In its effort to engage viewers with the problems posed in the film and thus examine their own perception of the past, *Wege in die Nacht* deploys *the ruin* as a central image. Just as the ruins of Walter's former company are closely aligned with his emotional state, they also indicate the necessity to confront the unresolved process of GDR remembrance in the post-wall present. After all, ruins are the material remainders of the dissolved state in the present. Kleinert employs the image of the ruin at four crucial moments in the film: 1) in the opening scene to establish the context in which the film examines GDR memories in the present, 2) when Walter returns to his former working site where he decides to take action against the alleged social deterioration, 3) during the final fallout with Gina and Rene, when they confront him with his past, and 4) in the context of Walter's suicide at the end of the film. In each of these scenes the ruins indicate a significant turn in the protagonist's life. Thus, it does not suffice to interpret the ruins and Walter's urge to return to the site as a mere coping strategy, "an attempt to restore some order" to a life that seems to have lost "all constancy and whose impermanence finds its apotheosis in the ruins and the rubble" (Hodgin 139). Quite the contrary, whenever Walter returns to the site of ruins, the film poses new problems that cannot easily be resolved. The image of the ruin thus functions as an *Aufforderung*, or challenge, to address these problems. Walter's inability to do so

presents the viewer with the unfinished task to engage with GDR memories, explore new possibilities of coming to terms, and contribute to the shaping of a new, post-wall present and future.

In the opening scene, for example, the image of the company in ruins is displayed without the presence of any character. A significant emphasis is thus bestowed upon the ruins right from the start. An establishing shot shows the panorama of a rural landscape without any inhabitants. It seems peaceful and idyllic. But, the camera then begins panning from right to left. Once panning comes to an abrupt halt, the dismantled company enters the frame. A long-shot establishes a context in which the film later explores the question of GDR memory in unified Germany: the factory in ruins is an image of the persistence of the GDR in the present. The ruins not only represent the dismantling of GDR industry after the fall of the wall. They stand as a reminder that, despite the end of the GDR as a political entity, its past continues to assert a place in the present. The absence of people is telling, too. Right from the start, the film suggests that the reminders of the past are not the responsibility of a select group of people (the protagonist, the East Germans, etc.). Rather, this void establishes a direct connection between viewer and object. In this first scene, the camera delivers different impressions of the factory in still shots, similar to photographs of the site. Each image conflates abandoned stone and forceful nature. Nature - wild ivy, bushes, high grass, dirt, and puddles - seems to claim what is left at the site. And yet, it is not nature that causes decay, but human neglect that allows nature to take over. The subsequent shot of four rusty pipes forcefully torn apart delivers this message well. The pipes represent the abrupt change that came about after the fall of the wall. And yet, this change has left marks, which the film forces on the viewers.

The image of the ruins as a reminder of the past in the present has a long tradition. In Kleinert's film the ruins carry a very different message than the image of ruins in the classic or romantic period. In Goethe's poem *Der Wanderer* (1772) for example, the ruin embodies the triad of past, present, and future. The past remnants have endured the ravages of time and thus embody duration, something stable, despite the transient nature of time. They carry within them the structural plan of a 'golden age,' an ideal, which the present time seeks to reestablish for a new (classical) era. The ruin is the past idea materialized in concrete form. Thus, it has the function of a monument that allows for the retrieving of the past idea in the present, thereby pointing to an ideal future. While, like Kleinert in his film, the writers of the romantic period tried to respond to the conflicts of their time by turning to the past (often represented by ruins), they took up political and social conflicts only for the sake of engaging in philosophical discussion about the status of the human being in the world. The advent of a hitherto unattained poetic age was the goal of romantic writers. But Kleinert's ruins speak more to a modern understanding of the early 1900s, which sees the ruin neither as an (aesthetic) idea nor as a divine repository of past ideals that presents itself to the present. Similar to what Georg Simmel wrote about ruins in 1919, Kleinert employs them insofar to recreate a bygone life, not according to its contents ("Inhalte") or remnants ("Reste"), but as the past as such ("Vergangenheit als solche") (132). The past as such is irretrievable in its essence, and yet it is present as thought, as memory.

Reconstructing the (GDR) past according to its contents and celebrating, even revitalizing, its remnants describe the phenomenon of *Ostalgie*. The *Ostalgie* wave reached its peak in the late 1990s with films such as *Sonnenallee* or *Helden wie wir*. These films, which were highly successful and resonated well with both West and East German audiences, do not

chronicle the current difficulties, but celebrate everyday-life in the former GDR. Although *Sonnenallee* offers some critique of the past by satirically questioning the nature of the GDR police state, it can be assumed that the bulk of its viewers overlooked this and focused more on the promotion of GDR pop culture. The film's success resulted in a plethora of television shows about the GDR and an increased interest in commodifying the GDR past. Its often surreal account of (predominately material) life in the former East, which features recognizable symbols and clichéd representations of GDR goods, is an artistic expression for the need and right to individual recollections of a lived past. By refusing all critical response to the legacy of the SED-state, the films focus on "re-exoticizing of the normal" (Cooke, *Representing East Germany* 141). While many have criticized this seductive, sanitized vision of the East, others acknowledge the urge to balance an uneven view of the GDR that denied the specificity to its citizens (Hodgin 166).

Wege in die Nacht responds to the *Ostalgie* films of the first decade after the fall of the wall. Unlike this nostalgic representation of the East, it refrains from depicting the past. By doing so, the film highlights what has been irretrievably lost: the material aspects of the past, which cannot be repossessed or revived, as many of the *Ostalgie* films attempt to do. The film *Good Bye, Lenin!* would later acknowledge the manipulations involved in restaging the GDR. Neither celebrating, mourning, or condemning the past, *Wege in die Nacht* concerns itself with what indisputably remains: the memories of this past, which permeate the present.

Instead of utilizing such memories to recreate the past, however, Kleinert's film makes the GDR memories an essential aspect of the present as a shaping force that triggers various responses. The film opens up the possibility to investigate these responses: Walter's retreat to authoritative and violent structures from the past provides the basis for his downfall and yet

challenges the viewer to seek out alternatives. One alternative can be seen in Silvia, who appears to adapt well to the new circumstances. Her character seems to provide a counter-narrative to the dominant story that most female Easterners were the ultimate losers in Germany's unification, since their experiences in a socialist society had left them ill-equipped to meet the new demands of Germany's post-wall era. And yet, although Silvia seems to have established a meaningful relationship to her past, her character still does not offer a model for successful post-wall adaptation. For the film forces her - like her female counter-part in *Das Leben der Anderen* - into the role of traitor. She turns her husband in in order to prevent him from robbing a jewelry store. Likewise, Walter's former work associates do not provide a fruitful alternative to his struggle. They seem to have done well for themselves by adapting quickly to the changing economic demands. And yet, the film portrays them as unscrupulous opportunists.

By presenting alternatives and at the same time undermining them, *Wege in die Nacht* questions all ready-made responses to the GDR past. It instead allows for a thorough examination of a variety of responses to a post-wall present that is imbued with the past, without condemning any responses while sanctifying another. The unresolved conflicts do not propose a forceful forgetting of the past. The image of ruin is a consistent reminder that such an undertaking is neither possible nor desirable.

The ruins become an incentive for the viewer, who is now forced to engage in these conflicts and challenged to envision alternatives. The film's effort to actively construct cultural memory becomes graspable in its final scene, when Walter commits suicide amidst the ruins of his former company. Before shooting himself in his car, he notices a group of children who are carelessly playing soccer on rubble and debris. A wide kick forces a girl, whose features resemble Gina's, to retrieve the ball, which landed near the car. A shot-reverse-shot between

Walter and the girl reveals an optimistic smile on both of their faces (and indicates a spiritual reconciliation between Walter and Gina). The girl runs off, stops quickly when she hears the bang of Walter's gun, and resumes the game without looking back. While the film ends tragically with Walter's suicide, it nonetheless counters this with an optimistic look toward the future. The younger generation, too, is drawn to the ruins of the past, but not because they mourn what has been lost. The children do not know anything but the present. But the final image alludes to the possibility of future critical correctives and their active engagement in the process of making cultural memory. By converting the field of ruins into a playing field, the film suggests that the new generation will open up new opportunities to envision a future that is meaningful. It will not be caught up in the past, that is, but connect it in new and significant ways to the present.

3.2 THE MID-2000S: REEVALUATING THE *STASI*-PAST – FLORIAN HENCKEL VON DONNERSMARCK'S *DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN*

Das Leben der Anderen (2006) is a feature film by West German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Born in 1973 in Cologne, von Donnersmarck studied at the School of Television and Film in Munich. He spent time abroad, mostly in Russia, the UK, and the US and received a number of short film awards at festivals. *Das Leben der Anderen* was his first feature film.

The fictional story remembers the day-to-day operations of the State Security apparatus in the former GDR. The film is set in East Berlin in the Orwellian year of 1984, when the *Stasi* is at the peak of its surveillance activities. The story centers on *Stasi* captain Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe), a dedicated communist and reliable force in the ranks of the *Stasi*. Wiesler conducts a

full-scale surveillance operation to observe the highly acclaimed and loyal playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) who is in a relationship with a star stage-actress, Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck). As observation “Lazlo” progresses, Wiesler gradually becomes disillusioned with his task and ultimately questions communist ideology and the means by which it is enforced. His disloyalty is due to a realization that the operation has not been set up because Dreyman is suspected to be involved in subversive activities. It has been motivated by personal reasons instead. State culture minister Bruno Hempf (Thomas Thieme) is exploiting his position to extract sexual favors from Christa-Maria and wants the rival Dreyman out of the way. Wiesler’s superior officer, Anton Grubitz (Ulrich Tukur), is also eager to find incriminating evidence against Dreyman and seizes the chance to boost his career. Via microphones hidden in the couple’s apartment, Wieser secretly monitors and documents every aspect of their lives from the attic in their apartment building.

After the suicide of Dreyman’s friend Albert Jerska (Volkmar Kleinert), who had been blacklisted as a theater director for over seven years, Dreyman begins actively to oppose the GDR state and its ideology. He establishes contact with the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* and anonymously publishes a critical text about the country’s suicide rate, the second highest in the world and information that the GDR refused to make public. Dreyman’s change of heart has a great effect on Wiesler, who also gradually changes. Despite Dreyman’s illegal enterprise, Wiesler decides to protect the couple after all at the cost of his own career. The film makes apparent that Wiesler’s change does not only come about by being disillusioned with real existing socialism. The exposure to art that has a significant influence on him. We thus see him slip into Dreyman’s apartment to steal a volume of poems by Berthold Brecht. Later, we find him lying on a sofa, fascinated by one of the poet’s more elegiac verses. Shortly thereafter,

Wiesler becomes entranced by Dreyman's rendition on the piano of "Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen." He then becomes a writer of fiction himself and creatively alters his reports about Dreyman in order to protect him. Even though Wiesler cannot avert catastrophe in the end - the death of Sieland, who cooperates with the *Stasi* to save her career - he removes incriminating evidence from Dreyman's apartment and thus plucks him from the jaws of the *Stasi*. The film jumps ahead in time and into the post-wall era. After reviewing his *Stasi* files, Dreyman discovers that Wiesler had saved him. Inspired by this good deed, he writes his first novel, entitled "Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen." It is dedicated to "HGW XX/7 in Dankbarkeit," the initials used by Wiesler as a signature on all official *Stasi* documents. Victim (Dreyman) and perpetrator (Wiesler) are reconciled in spirit and within the realm of art without ever meeting each other in person.

Das Leben der Anderen debuted sixteen years after Germany's reunification and garnered several awards, among them the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 2007. German and international audiences alike praised it as the first serious filmic attempt to come to terms with the oppressive nature of the former East German state and its infamous Ministry for State Security. This praise, however, overlooked a number of films made immediately after the fall of the wall, which had already addressed the legacy of the state security apparatus of the former SED-regime. The difference, of course, is that these films could not reach German audiences, let alone international ones. In the immediate post-wall era, film was not yet in the position to be a leading medium to discuss such issues.

First accounts of GDR life under *Stasi* surveillance came from East German directors. *Verriegelte Zeit* (1990), which traces filmmaker Schönemann's personal experiences with the *Stasi* and her subsequent expulsion from the GDR, as well as *Der Tangospieler* (1991) and *Der*

Verdacht (1991), which dealt with distrust in every-day life in the GDR, were some of the last films produced in the East German film-studios DEFA. Daniela Berghahn infers from the sparse recognition of these films' early contribution to GDR *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that German audiences were too wrapped up in the euphoria of unification to be interested in the depiction of painful memories of the unloved *Stasi* ("Remembering the Stasi" 322). While this explanation is certainly valid, we should not overlook the impact of the *Stasi* records act (*Stasi-Unterlagengesetz*) of December 1991 on the general awareness of the *Stasi* past in both former East and West Germany. Before the *Stasi* files were made accessible to the public, there was no immediate sense of public urgency to scrutinize its pernicious impact on the lives of GDR citizens. Furthermore, it seems that the legacy of the SED-regime and its infamous state security apparatus became first and foremost the subject in the political⁴ and the juridical⁵ realm. Only later did a wide range of artistic engagement take place, which made the topic accessible to a larger audience.

More than a decade after the law for the rehabilitation of SED-victims was passed and the juridical persecution of SED-perpetrators was considered complete, it became possible to spark the interest of a broad audience with a film that transfers these political and juridical negotiations into the realm of art and aesthetics. However, the increasing public interest in the 2000s in (German) history on screen was not only directed towards the GDR past. Films such as *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace* (2000), *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (2001), *The Pianist* (2002), *Baader* (2002), *Rosenstrasse* (2003), *Der Neunte Tag* (2004), *Der Untergang* (2004), *Sophie Scholl - Die letzten Tage* (2005), *Die Fälscher* (2007), *Der Vorleser* (2008), and *Der Baader Meinhof*

⁴ The federal state appointed two parliamentary *Enquete-Kommissionen* in 1992 and 1995 in order to undertake an examination of the SED-regime and close gaps in historical knowledge about the GDR past.

⁵ The First and Second Law for the Rehabilitation of SED-Victims in 1992 and 1994 aimed the rectification of SED-injustice. The law provided a legal regulation, allowing for the rehabilitation of people who became victims of politically motivated persecution in the former GDR.

Komplex (2009) all addressed topics from Germany's past – especially from the Nazi era and with a particular focus on the individual agents of the historical events.

Also, German television productions participated in the process of renegotiating visions of twentieth century German history in documentaries, TV miniseries, and docudramas such as *Holokaust* (2000), *Der Tunnel* (2001), *Stauffenberg* (2004), *Speer und er* (2005), *Der Bunker - Hitlers Ende* (2005), *Dresden* (2006), and *Wir sind das Volk* (2008). Film scholar Sabine Hake discerns a “growing significance of German film and media culture to the self-representation of the Berlin Republic,” which could explain the major box office success of the historical feature films, as well as the high ratings for television productions (193).

Historical films released in the first decade of the new millennia seemed to strike a cord with audiences. According to Hake, these films contributed to the reaffirmation and commodification of a national identity (194). In light of the many films about the Nazi era, it seems that the Berlin Republic revisited its past from a new angle - what could be called a pop historical angle - that indicates a growing fascination with, if not fetishization of, the historical agents of the Third Reich. In these films, history does not merely revolve around individuals and situate them within a historical context. Rather, individuals come to shape, represent, and even embody historical events and historical eras.

Unlike earlier attempts to confront the Nazi past, however, (especially those by *New German Cinema* filmmakers such as Edgar Reitz and his film *Heimat* from 1984), the 2000s witnessed a recollection that insisted on the monumentality of history as the story of individuals as historical agents. Such films defy the call for a critical position, not only toward the historical event that is presented but also toward the media that is presenting history on screen. Most of the German historical films and television productions from this time period claimed “authentic”

reconstructions of the past in order to create the illusion of presenting history to the audience up-close and personal. Some blurbs on DVD covers for example are suspiciously close to the Rankean claim of the nineteenth-century (empirical) historicism to present history ‘as it was.’ Accordingly, both a monumental approach to the past and the claim of authenticity or even historical ‘truth’ seem to be a well-flourishing style across a range of narrative formats, with television specializing in more fact-based genres, but also competing with the cinema in the production of epic formats and visual spectacles (Hake 199).

Released in 2006, *Das Leben der Anderen* fell on fertile soil. Not only did it present history on screen as a great melodramatic spectacle. It also chose a topic from Germany’s recent past that had hitherto received only little attention in film. And yet, the topic promised to provide everything necessary for a nail-biting thriller with a happy ending: the evil state security apparatus of the GDR on a quest to destroy true love, art, and beauty and the ultimate reconciliation between victim and perpetrator at the end. The marketing strategies for and the immediate reaction to the film did not center on the fictional aspects, the melodramatic spectacle, or the miraculous change in the beliefs of the main character Wiesler, however, its focus was first and foremost on an authentic depiction of GDR reality and the *Stasi* and its ultimate contribution to GDR *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In the mid-2000s, film has thus achieved be a crucial component in presenting images of the past. Its significance to the shaping of cultural memory is undisputable.

Underscoring the importance of *Das Leben der Anderen* for negotiating the GDR past in contemporary film, both filmmaker von Donnersmarck as well as actor and former GDR citizen Mücke frequently highlighted authenticity in his interviews. While von Donnersmarck reports

about “many people in the East [for whom] the film was a complete resurrection of the GDR”

(Esther 42), Mühe explains why he chose to be a part of the film as follows:

There have already been many attempts to capture and reorganize the GDR reality and also the topic of the Stasi. I read a lot of screenplays on this topic especially in the 1990s. But they always felt too short, didn't go far enough. And suddenly there was a book where everything felt right...I have a feeling for this time because I lived in it, among precisely the people that the film is about. And they were depicted very authentically and with a lot of sensitivity: in their relationship to one another, to art, to the state, to the Stasi. I felt that it was important that this film be made. (von Donnersmarck 182)

The notion of historical accuracy seems to be a deciding factor for the process of shaping cultural memory. In order to test its historical accuracies and to critically evaluate its contribution to the process of coming to terms with the GDR past, historians, film scholars, and others inevitably put *Das Leben der Anderen* under the microscope. Despite these repeated claims, many, and especially historians, felt uneasy about the film's claim of authenticity. Historians heatedly debate the film's self-legitimation as a serious form of historicizing Germany's recent past. This discussion, however, soon came to a dead end. Robert Rosenstone's *Historical Film: "Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age,"* which dismisses its contributions and inevitable shortcomings in providing visions of the past, proves to be a more valuable contribution to the understanding of historicizing on film. His charting of new methods to analyze historical films dismisses the perennial debates about accuracy-inaccuracy issues on the level of details. He emphasizes instead aesthetic aspects of filmic objects, which constructs a historical world to reveal (and possibly) alter the way we conceive of what we call history, past, the bygone.

Rather than reflecting history through the demand of authenticity, I ask how *Das Leben der Anderen* engages with the GDR past and how it forms memories of the GDR. Many avowals regarding von Donnersmarck's determination to “get the factual details right” and to pattern “major actions and situations...closely on actual events from the 1970s and 1980s” (Wilke 589)

cannot conceal the fact that *Das Leben der Anderen* is both *experimental* in its approach to the past and *assertive* in the way it constructs memories. We need to clarify first of all what *experimental* in this context means, before we will move on to examine the assertive mode of remembrance put forth by the film.

Das Leben der Anderen is not experimental in a way that would place it among films that stand in opposition to mainstream practice and to conventional codes of storytelling. It is neither an unconventional cinematic form nor a disjunctive treatment of the past that would bespeak an experimental mode of filmic engagement with the GDR past. While *Das Leben der Anderen* adheres to the characteristics of a standard historical film that depicts history as (melo-) drama (Rosenstone 55-57), it envisions a ‘what if’ scenario that experiments with the idea of human transformability despite adverse circumstances. In the film, a devoted Stasi officer is transformed into a good human being who turns his back on the authoritarian state, which he initially set out to protect. In order for this transformation to be believable, the film needs a historical framework that is convincing and that appears to be authentic. The ‘what if’ scenario requires historical conditions to be depicted as unquestionably or ‘objectively’ evil and anti-humanist. In the context of GDR history, this means depicting the former state as purely oppressive.

Disregarding the complexities and nuances of life in the former East German state, the film probes the idea of humanity, morally ‘good’ behavior, and forgiveness, leading to the reconciliation of *Stasi* victim and perpetrator at the end. Consequently, it employs a historical setting that stages the GDR past (seemingly objectively and, thus, truthfully) as all-encompassing, evil, oppressive totalitarianism in which the transformation from ‘evil’ to ‘good’ takes place. The film only knows this totalitarian reality. It makes us believe that there is no life outside these parameters and suggests that the GDR past as it is constructed in and through the

film is basically what remains to be recollected as the memory of an authoritative “Stasiland” (Dueck 604). The truthfulness to the material details in the film allows for a seemingly objective judgment about the depicted oppressive conditions. The film offers a particularly negative reading of the GDR past. It imposes memories, which cannot account for more intricate contemplations about the nature, conditions, and effects of the SED-regime, which rightfully lost its credibility.

Relying on this negative reading of GDR history, the *assertive mode of remembering* generates an all-encompassing sense of totalitarian oppression. Aesthetically, the film depends on the material effects of former Stasi equipment and other props, the coherent use of (drab) lighting, and the appropriate choice of (filmic) settings.⁶ In order to pass as historically authentic, the *assertive mode of remembering* in *Das Leben der Anderen* gives us the look of the past and thus slides into what Rosenstone called “false historicity” or the “myth of facticity” (57). The use of former GDR surveillance equipment in the film is no more than a period look, which by mere virtue of being in the film does not convey what this equipment (and its usage) might have meant to former GDR citizens.

Furthermore, the imposition of images of an all-oppressive state from which human kindness can arise requires von Donnersmarck to manifest his characters in a Manichean configuration of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ A major principal of the *assertive mode of remembering* is not only the representation of the past in rigid categories of ‘right’ and ‘wrong.’ It also generates historical judgments. For example, the complexity of the former GDR political system is shrunk down to a few evil characters such as Culture Minister Bruno Hempf. He comes to embody what the spectator is supposed to condemn. Hempf is the personification of the (alleged)

⁶ It has to be noted, however, that von Donnersmarck was not granted permission to shoot on the actual location of the former *Stasi* prison Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. One of the reasons was the redemption of Stasi captain Wiesler in the film.

ignorant and arrogant government of the former GDR and, as the film maintains, the manifestation of the communist ideology gone wrong. In a conversation with playwright Dreyman, Hempf makes unmistakably clear that the artist relies on and is subject to the power of the state. The abuse of (state) power is manifested in Hempf's sexual abuse of the actress Sieland. Hempf threatens to end her acting career immediately if she refuses to comply. As the viewer observes the rape scene in Hempf's limousine, the viewer is forced effortlessly into the role of a moral witness. In this role, the viewer is ultimately assigned the moral task of adequately evaluating and judging socialist society as it is depicted in the film, resulting in nothing but a negative and highly critical assessment of the GDR regime, its representatives, and misguided socialist values.

Asserting memories of the former East Germany in this fashion, the depiction of an all-encompassing evil state apparatus is most suitable for the film's experiment to transform Wiesler from an 'evil' into a 'good' human being. The film applies the black-and-white structure of an ethics that is based on the mutually exclusive logic of 'good' and 'evil' and 'right' and 'wrong.' The recognition of Wiesler's transformation from 'evil' to 'good' and from 'wrong' to 'right' moral behavior is rendered almost effortless for the viewers, if not to say it is basically forced upon them. In order to experiment with the idea of a transformation from an evil to a good human being in adverse political circumstances, von Donnersmarck requires the viewer to become emotionally attached to the characters that embody 'good' moral behavior and simultaneously despise all characters on the other side of the ethical spectrum.

The filmmaker achieves this by telling a story as a melodramatic tale. The *assertive mode of remembering* in the film thus puts strong emphasis on affect and emotions. The viewer emotionally identifies with the artist couple, whose innocent lives are being destroyed by the iron

fist of the totalitarian state. This emotional response eases the way for a morally correct judgment of history and the history of the former East German state in particular.

As melodrama, the film plot is driven by familial conflict, embedded in the overall political and social context of the GDR in the 1980s. The film produces an interpersonal domain as the *loci* in which past socio-political conflicts reside. History becomes the story of individuals, which makes history more accessible and inviting for moral judgment. The film is the story of the tragic fate of playwright Dreyman and actress Sieland and to a lesser extent the fate of director Albert Jerska. As it is often the case in historical melodramas, “the solution of their problems tends to substitute itself for the solution of historical and moral problems” (Rosenstone 55). This, however, is only partially true for *Das Leben der Anderen*. The film substitutes personal solutions for the solution of historical problems only with respect to two characters: Dreyman and Wiesler. Everybody else (victims as well as perpetrators) proves to have difficulties with remaining a person of integrity and is depicted as morally dubious. Eschewing a moral ambiguity, the film consequently lets these characters fail. For example, the viewer encounters Dreyman’s best friend Jerska, who suffers tremendously because the *Stasi*’s Culture Department has blacklisted him as a theater director. Unlike Dreyman, the charismatic film hero who takes action after he begins to view the regime more critically, Jerska internalizes the unjust treatment, is unable to fight back, and ultimately commits suicide. In the film, both Jerska’s suicide and Sieland’s sexual exploitation do function as two instances of suffering under state-oppression, but only marginally. These two instances function first and foremost as catalysts for Dreyman’s personal change. They pave the way for him to get on the ‘right side’ of history, that is, to resist and undermine the dying SED-regime. The film retrospectively applauds Dreyman’s incriminating actions and sanctions his behavior as morally right.

Piecing together the instances of injustice, arbitrariness, abuse, but also championing heroic behavior, the viewer grants Dreyman the status of both victim and hero. The film suggests that the position of the heroic victim is congruent with the notion of a good human being, again providing the best formula for a relatively easy identification. Dreyman's character is repeatedly depicted as caring, loving, and as person of moral integrity.

Evoking empathy and emotional attachment in the viewer is by no means a bad thing. Unquestionably, the achievement of a (melodramatic) historical film is its potential to contribute to an historical understanding by evoking feelings of empathy, emotional depth, and immediacy. Allowing the viewer to emotionally trace an experience of the past, to which he/she would otherwise have no access, a (melodramatic) historical film provides an (at least emotional) understanding of a past, not by pretending to show the viewer how the past actually 'was' and how it 'felt,' but by opening up possibilities to investigate one's own feelings toward this past and to facilitate new alternatives as to how to understand this past and one's own relationship to it.

However, the *assertive mode of remembering* in *Das Leben der Anderen* arouses empathy and emotions for a different and particular purpose. The film depends on the emotional support of the artist and ultimately the Stasi captain Wiesler, who attempts to rescue them in order to expose the GDR past as exclusively evil and condemnable. The GDR past is presented as the epiphany of misguided moral convictions. The morally erroneous sentiments, the film suggests, are the single force that defined East German communism; or inversely communism is based on a pernicious morality.

Against this backdrop, the transformation from evil to good within Wiesler serves to draw on and champion the morals of freedom, human dignity, and ultimately social democracy.

These are values of a political model that was the ethical basis of West Germany and became the fundamental idea of united Germany. By arousing empathy for the ‘right’ film characters, the *assertive mode of remembering* in the film hardly conveys a truthful notion of life under surveillance. The alleged life in the former GDR - as the film represents it - is a life dominated entirely by the oppressive nature of the state and its institutions. This is not only due to von Donnersmarck’s choice to have the dilemma of Stasi surveillance, lack of privacy, and blackmailing represented through the eyes of an elitist couple of artists.⁷ The inability to communicate an idea of these past experience is also due to fact that the film uses a set of morals, a humanist idealism, which is ‘alien’ to the GDR past.

The imposition of a moral perspective onto the historical context of the GDR can be explained by the film’s intention to judge retrospectively the GDR past. The moral framing, or how the film defines it as intrinsically ‘good,’ derives from the mindset of a post-wall new Germany. Unfortunately, these moral frames are not utilized to celebrate the fundamental ideas of a united Germany. Judging the GDR past for its lack of these values intends to show how ‘wrong’ the GDR was. According to the film’s logic, this judgment becomes possible because of the advantage of retrospective knowledge. History, the film maintains, has undone or even negated the values put forth by the workers’ and peasants’ state. For von Donnersmarck, the vanishing of the state and the new assessment of its underlying ideas provide the opportunity to discredit them, rather than to reexamine how we might position ourselves toward them and seek alternative ways to derive meaning from the past. Instead of scrutinizing the possibility to articulate new *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*, the main principal of the *assertive mode of remembrance* in the film is thus to assert universality for certain ideas, morals, mindsets, and

⁷ It is a well-known fact that the actual experience of artists differed greatly from those of the majority of ‘ordinary’ GDR citizens. They often enjoyed more freedom, had access to a broad variety of material goods, and enjoyed other privileges granted by the state.

opinions. Probing these “universal” ideas in a fictitious historical setting leads us to believe that the former GDR never aspired such universally sanctioned ideas. Rather than scrutinizing the conditions that fostered anti-democratic tendencies in the former GDR, which was felt as more and more oppressive in the mid-1980s, the film invites reading a fictional account of the GDR past as if it were something else: “*The Lives of Others* reminds us...that human beings have the ability to do the right thing through processes of empathy and identification with others, even in social conditions that seem to eradicate the very possibility of goodness” (Diamond 812).

Two questions now arise: First, how does the film champion these universal moral values (that adhere to the fundamental principles of the Berlin Republic)? And second, what effect does a retrospective (moral) judgment over the GDR past have on the formation of cultural memory in the Berlin Republic?

It is particularly art and artistic production that function as an aesthetic trope in the film to highlight universal concepts of ‘goodness.’ Probing the idea of moral transformability via high art (which results in the reconciliation between Stasi victim and Stasi perpetrator), the film brings to the fore the schematization of broader concepts such as humanity, humanist idealism, and morally ‘good’ behavior in a totalitarian regime. Accordingly, the film provides an aesthetic space in which historical and contemporary questions about moral values are projected onto the realm of art. The film suggests that Wiesler’s transformation from a devoted Marxist-Leninist to a ‘good human being’ who eventually embraces humanist universal ideals is triggered by his exposure to the fine arts, beauty, and the aesthetic value of literature and music. “The film,” Gary Schmidt writes, “explicitly references diverse literary genres [and] music and the central role it plays in the film. All of these are extolled for their ability to transform individuals from within and to provide meaning and permanence that outlasts the fleeting reality of the quotidian” (232).

Being at odds with the social and moral values of a socialist society, Captain Wiesler is increasingly exposed to Dreyman's life in the fine arts. Poetry, music, and the embracing of the beautiful kindle Wiesler's growing receptivity to a life of love and beauty beyond ideology. It is important to note that although Wiesler is gradually disillusioned about what has become of the very idea of a socialist state, he changes not merely because the idea of a 'real existing socialism' is fading, but because of the intrinsic transformative power of art.

Wiesler is forced to learn that the reasons for Dreyman's observation are rivalry, careerism, and lust. This makes him question the legitimacy of his task. He asks: "Is this what we signed up for? Didn't we vow to be shield and sword of the party?" This exposes Wiesler as a hardworking idealist who is ready to make the transition from Saul to Paul. Shortly after he had uttered growing suspicion about his superior's execution of the socialist idea, we see Wiesler reading in a Brecht volume, which he took from Dreyman's apartment. As the extra-diegetic music swells, the camera cuts to a close up of Wiesler's face. We hear Dreyman's voiceover, reading Brecht's "In Erinnerung an Maria A." from 1920. Surprisingly, Donnersmarck appropriates poet, playwright, and theater director Berthold Brecht, a devoted Marxist, to promote the idea of an inner transformation to humanist idealism. Scholars have evaluated this choice diversely. While Mary Beth Stein is convinced that the poem signals Wiesler's growing receptivity to a life of love and beauty beyond ideology (575), Jennifer Creech convincingly argues that von Donnersmarck's choice (unintentionally) deconstructs the narrative trajectory of the film:

[The] content and form of the poem is an overt critique of the sentimentality of bourgeois art...Taken out of context, the first stanza of Brecht's poem functions in the film to underscore Wiesler's melodramatic progression toward...devoting himself to aesthetic appreciation and political action. (108-09)

Von Donnersmarck's knowledge about Brecht's intentions notwithstanding, *Das Leben der Anderen* is obviously concerned with the effect that art and aesthetics have on Wiesler. Thus, this first exposure to art marks the beginning of an inner transformation that manifests itself in Wiesler's political resistance as a new world of feelings, humanist ideals, and universal values opens up to him.

The subsequent scene makes clear the impact of art on Wiesler. After Jerska's suicide, the grief-stricken Dreyman turns to a piano piece, entitled "Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen," providing yet another instance in which Wiesler gains access to an aesthetic world that gradually changes him into a better human being. The title of the piece is most fitting. Cinematically, this turning point is conveyed by the employment of an 180° camera pan. While listening to Dreyman's rendering of the piece over his headphones, Wiesler is sitting in front of all his technical equipment in the apartment's attic. The panning of the camera stops as we see Wiesler's face in a medium close-up. Tears are running down his face; an external marker for a higher state of self-reflexivity and an ongoing modification of his convictions. He is literally touched by the musical rendering. It will change him to a 'good man' and this is what he will be called three times throughout the film. In this scene, the camera cuts back to Dreyman. He turns to Sieland after he finishes the piano piece. Dreyman's subsequent question is the ethical centerpiece of the entire film: "Kann jemand, der diese Musik gehört hat...noch ein schlechter Mensch sein?" The camera cuts to Wiesler, leaving no doubt that the question addresses him. This scene signifies the new ethical path for Wiesler to overcome his ideologically distorted worldview. It already alludes to the final scene of the film, where Wiesler comes to the conclusion that Dreyman's novel *Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen* is for, and thus also, about him. What has been articulated verbally about Wiesler's inner state of being is retained and

verified in written form at the end of the film. Dreyman's novel perpetuates and solidifies the idea of a good human being in artistic form.

Pivotal to the scene are Dreyman's words about the music piece: "Ich muss immer daran denken, was Lenin über die *Appassionata* gesagt hat: 'Ich kann sie nicht hören, sonst bring ich die Revolution nicht zu Ende.'" Von Donnersmarck's choice of intertextual reference gestures again to the transformative power of art. But it does more than that. In quoting Lenin - who acknowledges the power of art, for it would force him to feel too much sympathy with the class enemy - the film aligns Lenin and Wiesler. However, Wiesler *is* forced to listen. As he absorbs the aesthetic world that Dreyman presents to him, Lenin's words seem accurate. Wiesler loses his belief in the communist ideal and embraces universal values of friendship, loyalty, and personal freedom.

Taken together, the two scenes (Wiesler reading Brecht and listening to the sonata) indicate that the film situates itself within a humanistic tradition that reaches far back into Germany's history and thus, as Schmidt points out, makes a gesture towards authenticity of representation that is not at all concerned with a "reality of experience" in East Germany (232). Von Donnersmarck's looks back at the GDR through a humanistic lens, thereby suggesting the truth and permanence of universal, eternal, and objectively 'good' values. The display of 'goodness' and ideology-free values in the film features the idea of ideal humanist values as transcending forces. Art and artistic appreciation is thus a vehicle to "transcend the dehumanizing aspects of political repression" (Stein 567) in general. *Das Leben der Anderen* is more concerned about the triumph of humanity under totalitarian rule rather than representing the totalitarian experience of life in the former GDR. This explains, too, why the film was internationally so successful. Historian Thomas Lindenberger writes: "The Lives of Others is

received outside Germany as a generic film about totalitarian rule, which just happens to be set in an otherwise unimportant communist country” (564). What this means in terms of audience expectation and the shaping of GDR memory in film is that many “may see it just as the continuation of the old German story, Nazis being replaced by Stasi” (564). While Lindenberger’s assessment of the narrative conflation of the two German dictatorships yields problems, the discussion about Germany’s first dictatorship, during the Nazi era, in relation to von Donnersmarck’s film is valid. One of the central elements that link the two dictatorships is the notion of “bürgerliches Erbe” (bourgeois heritage) during a time of totalitarian oppression.

Von Donnersmarck appropriates art as the classical “bürgerliches Erbe.” The film’s direct mention of composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), the obvious reference to Friedrich Schiller’s *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1794) via the *Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen* and the allusion to the idea of (a national) theater by means of Dreyman’s plays on stage situate *Das Leben der Anderen* in a humanistic tradition that reaches back to eighteenth-century Germany. This tradition, Ute Wölfel writes, “had served as an essential part of Germany’s national identity” (603). Emerging at the end of the eighteenth-century and in response to the traumatic experiences of the French Revolution, Schiller’s text became a canonical text of German bourgeois identity. Gradually disappointed with the bloody developments in France, Schiller proposed a Kantian vision about the interconnectedness of beauty and morality. He put forth the idea of an aesthetic education that would ultimately result in the moral improvement of men, but also foster the establishment of an ideal state. The film does not only make reference to Schiller with regards to his political writings. It echoes the sentiment of Schiller’s plays, especially *Kabale und Liebe. Ein Bürgerliches Trauerspiel* (1784). Similar to *Kabale und Liebe*, the film invokes a set of bourgeois core values, particularly the

notion of morality and freedom embodied in romantic love as opposed to love as an instrument within morally corrupt and oppressive power structures (Wölfel 606). While this *Trauerspiel* poses questions about the value system of the aspiring bourgeois class, von Donnersmarck offers a naïve reading of the paratext, which denies their critical and ambivalent aspects in favor of their ideal substance ‘materialized’ in an idealistic wish fulfillment (614-15).

Schiller’s work and Weimar Classicism in general became crucial markers during the 19th century for the notion of German national identity. Schiller, in particular, was considered an icon for the birth of a German *Kulturnation* (Koepeke 271). However, after the Third Reich, the notion of both German national identity and the German *Kulturnation* were contested. The Nazis appropriated and reapplied these concepts to their own purposes. Nevertheless, the notion of a German *Kulturnation* continued to influence the discussion about a common cultural heritage in the two German states. In light of his *Ostpolitik* and the effort to improve relationships between West Germany to the East bloc states, chancellor Willy Brandt (Social Democratic Party) of the former FRG considered pan-German culture as uniting force of the two German states despite their political partition. In the GDR, the debate about a German-German *Kulturnation* resurfaced in the late 1980s in light of the drastic changes in the GDR *Kulturpolitik*. On May 6, 1986, the German-German *Kulturabkommen* officially recognized the existence of a common German heritage and embraced fruitful cultural exchanges between West and East Germany (Emmerich 268). However, the SED-regime never deviated from the ideological stance that socialism and cultural production go hand in hand in the GDR. This sentiment, of course, as well as the question of a common German cultural heritage, was the main reason for the German-German *Literaturstreit* in the immediate post-wall period. Von Donnersmarck, too, discusses the importance of cultural production in his film. And yet, his depiction of the transformative powers

of art is fairly naïve, considering the long and intense debates revolving around the concept of a German *Kulturnation*, the notion of *Leitkultur*, and the difficulties of the reevaluation German of cultural production after the fall of the wall.

Other films have approached the topic of art and transformability in a highly critical and compelling way, i.e. Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* from 1974 or Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* from 2002. Von Donnersmarck, however, carelessly draws on the bourgeois heritage of the nineteenth century without critically examining the problems of restoring these ideals in the early twenty-first century. This film champions the classical heritage as eternal humanist ideals without taking into account the ultimate failure of 'high culture' in light of National Socialism and the indisputable limitations humanist ideals experienced during the Hitler regime.

According to the film's overall idea, the utopian scenario of humanist transformation within the historical context of the former GDR retrospectively sanctions these ideals as supreme, absolute, and eternal. Representing and celebrating these them by drawing on the historical context of the former GDR as all-totalitarian, anti-humanist, and 'evil' brings to the fore not only a great ignorance of the conflicting notion of (nineteenth-century) humanist ideals in the early twenty-first century. It also glosses over the very idea upon which the socialist state communism was established after 1945: East German Communist pursued an "intact 'antifascist' political tradition, which originated in the Weimar Republic and was believed to have continued in emigration during the period of Nazi rule." This dominant strand of Communist antifascism fostered an East German self-understanding that considered itself part of the democratic world fighting against fascist, inhuman, totalitarian regimes (Herf 13). Also, the appropriation of the German classical heritage in the film by no means intended to bridge the gap between West and East by drawing on a common cultural past. Rather, art (that is according to the film's logic

‘good’ art by means of its transformative powers) is depicted as alien to the GDR and only appears in the film to rescue good souls from the hand of evil communists. Depicting the classical cultural heritage as alien to the GDR past, the film eliminates an important common denominator between former West and East: this common denominator grounds the very idea of Germany’s unification. As captured in Germany’s Unity Treaty from October 3, 1990:

In den Jahren der Teilung waren Kunst und Kultur - trotz unterschiedlicher Entwicklung der beiden Staaten in Deutschland - eine Grundlage der fortbestehenden Einheit der deutschen Nation. Sie leisten im Prozeß der staatlichen Einheit der Deutschen auf dem Weg zur europäischen Einigung einen eigenständigen und unverzichtbaren Beitrag. Stellung und Ansehen eines vereinten Deutschlands in der Welt hängen außer von seinem politischen Gewicht und seiner wirtschaftlichen Leistungskraft ebenso von seiner Bedeutung als Kulturstaat ab. Vorrangiges Ziel der Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik ist der Kulturaustausch auf der Grundlage partnerschaftlicher Zusammenarbeit. (Einigungsvertrag Artikel 35 Abs. 1)

We need to ask then how the film’s *assertive mode of remembering* shapes GDR cultural memory in contemporary Germany?

Many scholars have argued that the film’s depiction of human ideals as mobilizing democratic forces for human agency is not so much concerned with forming a particular memory of the GDR but would rather indicate a post-1990 vision of reunified Germany (Dueck, Lindenberger, Bernstein, Schmeidel). The spiritual bond between Dreyman (the victim) and Wiesler (the perpetrator) would bespeak the idea of and wish for reconciliation between former perpetrators and victims in the post-wall era. This idea of a Stasi member protecting its subject of surveillance is clearly a wishful thinking projected onto the historical circumstances of the former GDR. Picking up on the idea of the current political agenda of reconciliation in unified Germany, Bernstein argues that the film makes a plea for “empathy and forgiveness“ (36).

But for others, the filmic representation of reconciliation, mutual understanding, and forgiveness just seemed too far fetched, if not illusory, since the reality of this endeavor presents

itself quite differently. For example, Peter Eisenfeld's publication a few years before the film's release on the social and economical disadvantages experienced by those who had been rehabilitated as politically persecuted in the former GDR sheds important light on a subject that was believed to be brought to a conclusion. Eisenfeld, raised in and later expelled from the former GDR, revealed in his study that financial compensation after the fall of the wall was mainly granted to those who had experienced prison time or blacklisting due to their political resistance in the GDR. Others, whose resistance or subversive attitude was sanctioned by the state with demotion or in other ways to constrain advancement in one's career (which Eisenfeld calls *Aufstiegsschäden*, literally to damage someone's promotion) could not hope for any compensation or, even worse, are subject to reduced retirement payments in the Federal Republic (13-16).

While the film may aim at mutual understanding, victim-perpetrator reconciliation, and forgiveness (or may at least trigger this welcome sentiment in the viewer), it must not be overlooked that the *assertive mode of remembering* the GDR in *Das Leben der Anderen* proposes a particular historical narrative, which has a profound impact on how we form an understanding of the GDR.

In her evaluation of *Das Leben der Anderen* sociologist Susanne Schmeidel concludes that von Donnersmarck's film was a "historical fiction movie that depicts reality" and leaves us with an "uneasy feeling...at what humans and humanity under totalitarian regimes can become" (557). While Schmeidel acknowledges the fictional character of the film, it seems that von Donnersmarck was successful in creating a commemorative image of the GDR that is solely defined by state terror, oppressive surveillance mechanisms, and - to put it bluntly - evil communists who only pursued their (immoral) personal advantages. The film's unilateral

treatment of the GDR past, which once more underscores the illegitimacy of the socialist state, echoes to some extent the immediate attempts of the state government in the early 1990s to address the legacy of the SED-regime in order to get a process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* under way. However, it is not von Donnersmarck's intention to question these post-wall political actions and to retrace a more faceted and nuanced GDR reality in film. In fact, *Das Leben der Anderen* was praised for its contributions to GDR *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The film remembers the oppressive and destructive nature of the *Stasi* with spectacular images and a compelling narrative. The GDR that is constructed in the film only knows this totalitarian reality and nothing else. And this is reason enough to exercise caution with regards to past 'realities' that the film supposedly creates. As Stein writes,

Das Leben der Anderen ... has perpetuated, if not created, several misperceptions about the East German state and its security apparatus, reducing the East German experience to victims and perpetrators glosses over the more complex realities of accommodation and complicity that implicated a much larger percentage of the population. (568-69)

The *assertive mode of remembering* in the film effects our understanding of the GDR past und forms commemorative images that solidify the notion of the former GDR as evil, inhuman, and all-oppressive totalitarianism. The film evaluates the GDR on these terms and concludes from a standpoint of moral superiority how 'wrong' its past was. The GDR past in the film is, as Stein correctly assesses, reduced to an all-totalitarian experience in which only a rigid differentiation between 'good' and 'evil' is possible. The film creates a filmic reality in which its agents are forced to take sides according to a Manichean logic: they are either 'evil' and thus communist or they are 'good' and thus anti-communist. These two diametrically opposed positions are echoed in the dialogue between Dreyman and his friend Hauser. Hauser accuses Dreyman for his passivity and lack of courage to decide the side to which he belongs: "Irgendwann muss man

Position beziehen, sonst ist man kein Mensch.” Both Dreyman and Wiesler are two sides of the same coin. They both believe in the project of socialism and become disillusioned. The film depicts their respective acts of opposition as redemptive on a small level in order to exonerate them from being agents of an evil state.

Das Leben der Anderen asserts a historical narrative not as a way of reconstructing and reinvestigating moments in which political change was possible and set in motion. Rather, it imposes a view that inevitably solidifies the past into pre-formulated judgments, thereby foreclosing the possibility of enriching the present by gaining more knowledge from the past. The film’s framing of the GDR past as wrong implies a verdict that retrospectively asserts how the past should have been: more moral, more human, more right etc. The film’s story limits *human* behavior in the former GDR only to people who positioned themselves against the state, its agents, and its grounding philosophy. The state’s final disintegration in 1989 legitimates the position of the film. Undertaken in hindsight, the film does not explore the complexities of what it meant to live in the GDR when it seemed to be a resilient society.

The end of the GDR as a political entity seems to (retrospectively) justify the way in which the film remembers it. Its narrative takes place during the GDR and follows a trajectory that depends on the spectator’s knowledge about its end. In one particular scene, the film even references the end of the GDR, when the camera cuts to a newspaper that shows an image of Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the communist party of the Soviet Union. This image anticipates the downfall of the regime in the film, which has the effect of furnishing more evidence for the correctness of the resisting personas. Gorbachev’s image signifies the reform policy *perestroika* and *glasnost*, which initiated drastic changes in the political and social

landscape of the Soviet Union and its satellite states and marked the beginning of the collapse of the East Bloc.

This imagery can only be understood from the retrospective angle, through which the film works. Narrated from the standpoint of post-wall Germany, the film sanctions Dreyman and Wiesler's "narrative trajectory of resistance" in a totalitarian state (Creech 110). Embracing bourgeois values, both characters become democratizing forces in a communist state that has lost its credibility and - as the film maintains - should always be remembered as such. By means of approving both Dreyman and Wiesler's subversive actions, the film exposes the democratic self-understanding of the former German Democratic Republic as deficient and thus legitimizes the democratic forces that are fundamental for the time in which the film originated. They become the foundation from which to access the GDR and upon which to judge its past. Wiesler's good spirit gains permanence in the aesthetic realm of Dreyman's post-wall novel and thus bespeaks or even reinforces the values that von Donnersmarck attributes to post-wall society.

From the position of retrospective (historical) knowledge, which registers the GDR's limitations and knows about the inexorable end of a 'real existing socialism,' the film petrifies the history of the GDR. The mnemonic experiment of a 'what if' scenario of the past soon reverts to an accusatory stance of a 'what should have been.' "Warum bleibt mir dieses Sehen nicht erspart" is the crucial line in Dreyman's play *Die liebenden Gesichter* in the film. The visionary's anticipation of future events acquires a double meaning in this context. Within the film, it clearly references Wiesler's future encounter with the artist couple and his (forced) exposure of high art, which will change him forever. The film also applies these lines in order to draw on the existence and truthfulness of 'good' human values that resides in each and every individual. The ability to foresee and anticipate change is due to the inherent goodness of

mankind and should function as an imperative to change adverse (political and social, and even totalitarian) circumstances.

The film does not investigate alternative ways of how people could have experienced or dealt with totalitarianism. The uncritical championing of the high arts that von Donnersmarck straightforwardly identifies as the driving force towards democratic change suggest a desire to trace the continuity of a bourgeois tradition that seems to bypass the GDR or to merely expose it - and that means to remember it - as a wrongful, inhuman socialist experiment that was doomed. From the retrospective standpoint of the film, von Donnersmarck makes the GDR fit into a predetermined version of morally correct behavior, regardless of (historic) time and circumstance.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Von Donnersmarck narrates a story in *Das Leben der Anderen* that follows the trajectory of nineteenth-century bourgeois values and embeds these values uncritically in the twenty-first century in order to facilitate a retrospective (negative) judgment of the GDR past. The *assertive mode of remembering* in the film fosters a perception of the GDR past as exclusively negative, inhuman, and amoral. The film evaluates the GDR on these terms and concludes from a standpoint of moral superiority how ‘wrong’ its past was, thereby negating the possibility to rethink *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* regarding the legacy of the *Stasi* past.

Das Leben der Anderen is set precisely in the moment when the GDR state was at its peak of state surveillance. The state’s end was not insight. Wiesler’s metamorphosis to a ‘good’ man comforts the viewer as he sees values that define the Berlin Republic triumphing in the end.

The attempt to grant these values eternal truthfulness provides the foundation for evaluating the GDR past according to these parameters. The overall emplotment satisfies the additional need, as Lindenberger puts it, “to be on the morally good, but also on the proactive side of history” (563).

Thus, the film makes a proactive engagement with history possible, but it is based on the premise that the viewer knows the outcome of the historical event, that is, has historical knowledge about the *end* of the GDR state. The film’s intention to show how ‘wrong’ the GDR past was implies a verdict that retrospectively asserts how the past should have been more moral, more human, more right.

Andreas Kleinert’s *Wege in die Nacht* engages with GDR past very differently. It neither moralizes nor judges. The fictitious story serves to lay open structural problems that connect the past to the present. The film points to unresolved issues from the past by acknowledging them as an inherent part of the present. The *elusive mode of remembering* makes *Wege in die Nacht* a highly self-reflexive film. It withdraws from offering solutions. Thus, the film is a case *sui generis*, a unique artistic attempt to provide a framework in which negotiations about the GDR memory in contemporary Germany take place without rigidifying the dialogue or imposing an interpretation of the past on the viewer.

The film thus plays a vital role in the making of cultural memory, as the ‘present past’ becomes the filmic object of continuous deliberation and thought. *Wege in die Nacht* communicates its commemorative attempt as the need to rethink *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*. It draws on the infinite process of establishing meaningful relations to the past. The film denies the viewer any concrete suggestions as to how to ‘come to terms’ with the GDR past. By means of employing the image of the ruin, it rather argues for an infinite process of engaging with the

present past meaningfully, defining the very essence of memories as lively, multidirectional, disputed, and inconclusive.

As the next chapter shows, this notion of remembrance as a lively discourse and collective endeavor is echoed in the highly disputed process of memorial creation in Germany's post-wall commemorative landscape. Understanding the modes of articulating cultural memory on a larger, official level means 1) to pinpoint crucial moments in the process of memorial creation in order to 2) see how remembrance is contestational and displaying an immediacy of social setting and communal moment. The next chapter shows how cultural meaning derives from the participation of particular and various actors. It highlights the significance of memory as a constituting force for articulating collective self-understanding.

4.0 THE GDR PAST IN MEMORIAL SITES: HISTORY AS MNEMONIC DEBATE

This chapter studies the difficult process of forming cultural memory into publically available symbolic space. Memorials are external articulations of communally negotiated views of the past in the present. They bespeak a thoroughly mediated relationship between the past and those performing acts of remembering in the present. The “present past,” as Andreas Huyssen has called it, is thus not so much the alignment of *a* society with a certain narrative of historical time (*Present Pasts* 4). Rather, memorializing the past constitutes society and brings individuals into communication *as* society. Thus, acts of memorialization reveal how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering.

The molding of cultural memory into commemorative images pertains to questions of cultural identity and socio-political self-understanding of a collective that remembers collectively. To study the process of memorial creation is thus to investigate how society - in this case German society in the Berlin Republic - performs acts of remembering as expressions of forming a relationship to the past. In the case of this chapter how memorial creations constitute a particular *German* society. Specifically, the creation of memorial sites commemorating the former GDR entails a complex decision-making processes, involving various participants and different approaches to the past. There is by no means undisputed agreement as to how to represent ‘appropriately’ the communist past in and through memorial space. While the collective effort certainly aims at a broad consensus among all participants, the contestational

nature of the deliberations testifies to the *multi-directionality* of memory, emphasizing a certain *disputed conclusiveness* pertaining to all acts of memorialization.

The notion of *multi-directionality* and *disputed conclusiveness* will be examined in detail in this chapter. In particular, I focus on the extensive procedures of memorial creation regarding two former GDR prison facilities: the central remnant facility of State Security in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and the largest GDR prison for women, *Schloss Hoheneck* (castle Hoheneck) in the state of Saxony. In exploring the development of these sites, I show how remembrance is contestational, displaying an immediacy of social setting and communal moment and how cultural meaning derives from the participation of particular and various actors. These are multi-directional forms of communication between and amongst actors. It is at times top-down, at times activist in nature from the bottom up, and at other times, it is more equitable and less agonistic. Multi-directionality is, to a certain extent, also defined by propensities in the German system of governance to offer state subsidies for cultural projects.

The extensive process of memorial creation reflects how manifold and diverse the memory of the GDR state is. The *disputed conclusiveness* as the dominating trait of memorial creation emphasizes the existence of competing recollections of the past, which defy any final and conclusive notion of a “collective” or “commonly shared” memory of the past. Pinpointing the decisive moments in memorial creation and highlighting the contestational nature of collective remembering allows us to study the notion of a remembering society not as essence or self-evident given but as process and self-determining endeavor.

The two sites, Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and Hoheneck, are both material manifestations of a past that appears to be historically significant for post-wall Germany. As historically significant markers in Germany’s commemorative landscape, they both are mnemonic

expressions for the collective effort (and dispute) of demarcating a place that embodies what art historian Alois Riegel has called “gewollter Erinnerungswert” (172). Looking at the long and difficult process of negotiating the respective *Erinnerungswert* (commemorative value), both sites allow us to extrapolate key moments, leading to the institutionalization of memory as the final and crucial step in the collective effort of performing society through acts of memorialization.

Similar to individual remembering (where some memories are prioritized over others while others are suppressed or forgotten entirely), the collective effort of creating memorial sites displays strategies of emphasizing, accentuating, or disregarding certain aspects of the past that are considered (un)important. In both cases, the establishing of a particular historiography of the past (and the difficulties to do so) require an intense process of engaging critically with the past, negotiating its meaning, and stressing certain aspects over others.

The memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen was brought into focus of the commemorative discourse soon after unification. Both state officials and the public instantly recognized the site as an historically significant place that authentically represents political prosecution and state-mandated oppression in the former GDR. However, envisioning and implementing commemorative forms proved to be difficult. Despite its institutionalization in 2001, the *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* remains a crucial site for the study of collective memory. Similar to literary and cinematic investigations into the nature of *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*, the process of memorializing GDR remembrance demanded a collective effort to deliberate upon *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*. As the discussion will show, this effort necessitated a collective agreement as to how to translate these *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* into memorial space.

While the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen offers insight into the process of memorial creation and highlights the dynamic aspect of memory culture in contemporary Germany, the former prison for women, Hoheneck offers a unique opportunity for comparison and engagement. The latter site is only beginning the process and offers a privileged opportunity to investigate memorial creation right from the start. The example of Hoheneck is unique since for more than a decade the site's commemorative value had not been recognized officially, despite numerous public efforts to draw attention to the historical significance of the former prison facility. With the implementation of a *Stiftung Gedenkstätte Schloss Hoheneck* still pending, Hoheneck is a prime example for the disputed conclusiveness regarding the institutionalized meaning of a site in the process of memorial creation in the Berlin Republic.

4.1 THE MEMORIAL SITE BERLIN-HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN: FROM CENTRAL REMAND FACILITY TO A SITE OF MEMORY, MOURNING, AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

At the time the Berlin wall fell, the State Security Prison in East Berlin's district Hohenschönhausen underwent an historically important shift in Berlin's urban landscape. The imminent collapse of the GDR and the possibility of Germany's reunification within reach turned the hitherto well-organized GDR institutions and firmly established executive facilities upside down. The facility Hohenschönhausen, which had served as one of the most important and notorious prisons of the Ministry for State Security in the GDR, lost its legitimation as central *Untersuchungshaftanstalt* (remand facility) of the communist regime within weeks. Thus, it is not surprising that prison officials had already begun to erase some traces of the facility's

horrendous past. Well aware of the significant political changes and the haste with which other institutions, such as the central complex of the Ministry for State Security at *Normannenstrasse* in Berlin tried to destroy incriminating documents, the prison officials at Hohenschönhausen followed suit, “even to the point of installing planters with flowers to effect a more benign ‘decoration’” (Verheyen 163). Of course, all such attempts could not blur the fact that the facility’s initial function was to persecute criminally suspects who were thought to have engaged in illegal activity, as stated by GDR law.

In the process of post-wall negotiations about the GDR heritage and the bestowing of new meaning on its remains, it proved essential for various people from the opposition to the GDR to seek out places that testified to the wrongdoings of the fallen regime. The making of cultural memory was undertaken as a collective effort. Thus, former detainees, grassroots initiative, and the public instantly proposed ideas of what places should commemorate in the future. In the case of the central remand facility in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and its conversion into a memorial site, it was crucial that officials and the public identified the prison as a highly sensitive object of great commemorative value even before the last prisoners were released from the facility in 1990. This notion of *immediacy* regarding the acknowledgment of a historically significant place and the subsequent forming of interest groups fighting to preserve its commemorative value is a crucial principle in the process of memorialization.

Quickly after the closure of the prison, citizen activists, among them former detainees, formed groups and grassroots initiatives and monitored the deliberation on future plans for the facility. The initial proposal by Berlin’s Justice Department to use some of the interrogation rooms for the *Landeskriminalamt* (State Department of Criminal Justice) was the first instance of a key veto by these groups. The fact that this idea was not even debated as a serious option

highlights further the importance of immediacy regarding the time to claim a right of input in the decision-making process of memorial creation.

Certainly, the implementation of a foundation *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* in 2001 was the result of a joint commitment to a prompt and satisfying completion of the memorial site. It was accomplished by parallel - and by no means like-minded - concepts formulated by officials and the public in the first instance, which then gave rise to the productive cooperation of all participants. This does not mean, however, that the process had not been difficult or disputed. In fact, the work of the foundation is still assessed critically and debated (Hofmann, Kappeler and Schaub, Jones). The case of Hohenschönhausen reveals the diverse and conflicting standpoints regarding GDR memory in reunified Germany. The continuous discussion about a commemorative approach reveals cultural memory as a collective process that remains disputed and is often inconclusive. Studying the developments at the site brings to the fore that collective memory is a multi-directional process that involves the participation of various actors in the making of cultural memory. The analysis underscores the dynamic aspect of cultural memory as pivotal in the process of memorial creation. This dynamic aspect of cultural memory seems to allow for a greater sensitivity to changes of how we view and evaluate the past over time.

The contours of this contestational and dynamic quality of memory culture in reunified Germany is best shown if we examine the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen as proceeding through four developmental phases: a first phase of vague endorsements of the idea *Gedenkstätte Berlin- Hohenschönhausen* by federal and local officials, a second phase of public initiatives that took place parallel to official deliberations, a third phase that is characterized by the cooperation between officials und the public for a common cause, and a fourth phase that describes the subsequent difficulties in charting out a commemorative agenda. What we witness

in all phases and what ultimately brought the implementation of a memorial foundation along, is a kind of bipolar struggle between “top-down” official deliberations launched by officials, experts, and state authorities on the one hand, and “bottom-up” public initiatives on the other. However, these two developments took place simultaneously and did not follow each other. They often intertwined with and determined each other, and yet provided a basis, upon which a final step for the site’s completion could be taken, remaining controversies notwithstanding.

4.1.1 First Phase: Vague Endorsements of the Idea “Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen” by Federal and Local Officials

The memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen provides a stark example of a kind of tightrope walk that involved various participants in the making of cultural memory. In 1992 Berlin’s House of Representatives began to deliberate on plans for the appropriate use of the facility in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen. Simultaneously, several groups of citizen activists immediately engaged in the discussion, carefully monitored all deliberations by officials, and insisted strongly on a right of input in the entire decision-making process. Arguing that a memorial site would be the most adequate resolution, citizen activists favored the idea to create a site that would focus solely on the legacy of the State Security Apparatus and the depiction of victimhood. In this request, they were supported by the Berlin Senate, which decided against a proposal submitted by district representatives. This proposal suggested a memorial project that would merely focus on the “abuse of state authority,” and would have essentially meant the incorporation of the site’s history during the Nazi past (Verheyen 166). Thus in May 1992, the *Bezirksverordnetenversammlung* (local governing body) of Hohenschönhausen instructed district authorities to cooperate with the senate in order to expedite further decisions. In the same year,

one of their immediate actions taken was to designate the complex as an historical site on the grounds that the prison facility and its surroundings would serve as a good example of the “structural documentation of terror and the inhuman investigation methods of the Ministry for State Security” (167).

The way in which former detainees insisted that the remembrance of Hohenschönhausen should focus on the immediate past of the site during the GDR and ultimately represent their suffering as victims was a determining factor for the future commemorative agenda of the memorial site. This intensive engagement sought to place emphasis on the site’s past during the SED regime and to do so through accounts of eyewitnesses, the victims. The role of the public - and in particular the former detainees - is significant in the whole process of not only nurturing the idea of a permanent site but also sketching out the design, function, and meaning that the former state security prison would eventually comprise. The involvement resulted in a commemorative approach that depicted the site’s past through the eyes of individuals who experienced political oppression at the facility first hand. The hope was that the communication of individual memories would provide a complex and diverse picture of the past. The former victims drew on their status as *Zeitzeugen* (contemporary witness). As such, they became important historical (re)sources and functioned as indispensable consultants in the mnemonic endeavor to represent the past of the site. Thus, guided tours through the facility by former detainees are a cornerstone of Hohenschönhausen’s current exhibition. Rather than contextualizing the site’s past in broad categories to make it part of Berlin’s topography of places that generally represent the abuse of state authority, the facility claims its singularity and distinctiveness in the memory of the GDR history by focusing on eyewitness experiences and providing personal memories of the authoritarian regime. The preservation of the site’s

authenticity did not just include the material history of the site. Cultural memory is lived and communicated by people, including the conveying of memories in form of oral history.

The activist group soon began to develop a concept for the envisioned memorial site. This eagerness to expedite the planning and construction stemmed primarily from the hope to gain funding for the project from the federal government. Throughout this process, the activist group, as well as Berlin's administrative body, never lost sight of the importance of state governance in German memorial creations. For the building of appropriate national memorial sites in the Eastern states, the Bundestag, then still meeting in Bonn, had decided in March 1993 to cover up to fifty percent of the expenses of such undertakings. Consequently, Berlin's authorities anticipated governmental financial support for the project in Hohenschönhausen and quickly pushed a resolution forward. While we witness multilateral forces at work in order to set the policy of GDR remembrance into motion, governmental financial support for individual projects has always been crucial for the realization of commemorative undertakings. Since the immediate post-wall era experienced a variety of proposals for the creation of memorial sites, the advocates for a memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen found themselves in funding competition over federal resources.

Governmental financial support for establishing a commemorative agenda regarding the GDR past played a key role during the period of reorientation in the early 1990s. By taking over responsibility for key sites of communist oppression, the federal government played a crucial role in providing funding for the creation of memorial sites. As part of the greater memory politics agenda, the government adopted powers to set the parameters of national memory and established the thematic focus of national commemoration (Clarke 8). In order to receive state funding, the proposals for individual sites had to adhere (at least partially) to the commemorative

agenda of the state, further highlighting the importance of governance in this phase of memorial creation. State officials closely monitor articulations of cultural memory and decide over the financial support for the realization of various commemorative projects. State-mandated memory aims at the implementation of officially sanctioned articulations of *Erinnerungskultur*. And yet, as the case of Berlin-Hohenschönhausen shows, memorializing the past is not solely a state-mandated, ‘top-down’ enterprise. Especially during this early phase, cultural memory was negotiated in a larger democratic arena. Various participants approaching the task of creating a memorial site from different angles engaged in the process of collectively remembering a past they sought to memorialize. As a large collective effort, commemoration constitutes a remembering society. During this phase, various individuals - ranging from federal officials to former detainees - came into communication *as* society. Thus, acts of memorialization are not exclusively performed by the state or occur as part of state’s identity politics. The example of Berlin-Hohenschönhausen shows how society arises through collective remembering and how remembering (as experience in itself) offers society an experience of itself.

With financial issues still lingering, another aspect continued to be a matter of discussion during this phase. While Hohenschönhausen as commemorative site was established on a macro-level, the reason for delay to implement institutionalized commemoration occurred on the micro-level of commemoration politics. Reasons were to be found in the main controversy revolving around the question how the site should be designed and organized, what purpose it should serve, and, most importantly, what the official role of the former inmates for the site’s commemoration should be. Unable to find an agreement, Berlin’s senate was forced to procrastinate on the project. The disputed conclusiveness regarding the site’s commemorative agenda necessitated a

second phase of deliberations, testifying to the socially productive dynamic of GDR memory in the process of creating memorial sites.

4.1.2 Second Phase: Parallel Public Initiatives

While Berlin's senate debated an appropriate way to develop a future memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, considered possible funds, and sought after potential investors, the public initiatives for the site's commemorative future gained significant momentum in this phase. It is particularly striking that the public initiatives took place parallel to governmental policies of memory work during the entire decision-making process. Often acting and protesting against official deliberations and supporting those ideas they felt to be reasonable, their voices could hardly be ignored and resulted ultimately in major contributions to the state's final decision to construct the memorial site as it appears today. Former detainees in particular expected the authorities to commence immediately with decisive action at the site. Their contribution was indispensable for institutionalizing the remembrance of the site. Thus, even before the senate came to the decision to place the entire facility under historical protection at the end of 1992, the district office, which exercised interim administrative control, spontaneously organized tours for curious citizens with the help of former detainees. Although these tours were irregular, one needs to underscore that this phenomenon ushered in a growing public interest that led to the institutionalized form of regular public accessibility in 1994.

From this point on, Hohenschönhausen began to keep well-documented statistics of annual visitors to the site. During the development of a final concept for the memorial site over the next three years, more than 21,000 people visited. This 'bottom-up' public initiative of spontaneously organized tours set the course for the design and organization of

Hohenschönhausen. The grassroots endeavor brought public and former victims' influence to bear, and rendered their opinions, knowledge, and active involvement indispensable for the state's policy of ascertaining GDR memory work on a common basis of historical integrity. Hence, it is appropriate to assume that the spontaneous tours by former detainees played an integral role in the senate's decision to abandon previous plans for the ultimate use of the facility as a more general national museum, a kind of documentation center about the GDR (Verheyen 167). One aspect of the plans for a national museum had been the integration of some former GDR monumental sculptures into Hohenschönhausen's complex. The unexpected collapse of the GDR regime resulted not only in the questions of how to pursue meaningful memory-work of the GDR, but also how to proceed with hundreds of former East Berlin's memorials and monuments that had symbolized the Bolshevik regime. After having swept away the great majority of symbols in urban spaces, the unified nation faced the task of re-appropriating these "relics" of the communist past by ascribing new meaning to them in their concept of remembering (Ladd 192-214).

The former detainees refused the aestheticization of the prison space and instead advocated for a more interactive and dynamic approach. They were compelled by the site's authenticity, which the commemorative endeavor should preserve and even foreground. The inmates drew upon their situation as authentic representatives for the site's memorial tasks. They felt that the site should be designed in the same spirit: they attempted to keep the complex as it has been during the SED-regime. To preserve the facility in its given form, the site should function as place of remembrance, reflection, and information. It should honor those who suffered for their resistance or opposition to the SED-regime and should symbolize the value of a life of freedom and human dignity. Fearing that the integration of monumental sculptures would

undermine the sense of authenticity of the state security prison, former prisoners convinced Berlin's Senate to give up on these plans (Verheyen 167). This shows once again how unpredictable and sometimes fast-changing the course of GDR memory creation was during initial phase of reorientation in the post-wall era. With many places, monuments, and commemorative plans in limbo, it was all the more important for those invested in the memory process to remain flexible, and yet persistent, during the intensive and multifaceted debates about the GDR and its memory.

The liveliness with which the memory of the GDR was debated at the time was not only captured in Kleinert's film *Wege in die Nacht* or in the attack on Christa Wolf and her novella *Was bleibt*. This dynamic made it difficult but imperative to approach memorial creation from a more dispassionate and historiographically grounded standpoint. The establishing of a historiography of the site was thus indicative for charting an overall concept for a future memorial site. In the case of Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, this meant that the senate began background research on the history of the prison, its mode of operation as the most important remand facility of the regime, and the conditions and procedures the detainees had to endure during their incarcerations. By assessing the site from an historical perspective, the officials hoped to enrich their understanding of the prison's nature in the past in order to chart out plans for its future meaning. The group of historians and other experts appointed for this undertaking reported in August 1993 that little to no archival documentation with data about former inmates could be located in Berlin. The lack of this material resulted in an enormous effort by the authorities to begin a process of properly documenting the site's history. This marked the hour of birth for the foundation *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* and, thus, the beginning of the final steps toward becoming a memorial site.

By law, the foundation would later list as its primary task to research the history of Hohenschönhausen prison from 1945-1989 (Staatskanzlei Berlin). The methodological approach that was chosen was to make eyewitness testimonies a prime source, which rendered numerous associations of former political prisoners or individual victims of the GDR indispensable for the undertaking. In this phase, a spirit of cooperative interplay between official and public forces also manifested itself in the foundation's law of 2000. The text stresses the importance of the site, which seeks to stand as a concrete reminder of state-organized terror. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of the former detainees, who witnessed the daily routine of incarceration as politically persecuted victims of the SED-regime. The incorporation of former victims at the organizational level of the foundation also bespeaks the site's dual function as *Gedenkstätte* or place of contemplation at the former site of destruction, as well as a *Begegnungsstätte* or place to encounter and meet. The former victims actively engaged in envisioning the site, its design, and organization, and they shared their memories of the past not only with visitors, but, most importantly, with each other.

As both *Gedenk-* and *Begegnungsstätte*, the memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen emerged as groundbreaking in Germany's post-wall era. It functioned as a model for many other memorial sites to come. The site marks, then, an important transformation of memorialization toward a multi-directionality of remembering in Germany in general. And the site specifically draws on the lively process of remembering as communal engagement. The site models how to provide a realm in which former victims gain the opportunity to experience the sense of collectivity at a shared place. By sharing their stories orally and in written form, they can communicate a past that is acknowledged by a larger community. This communal act functions as a kind of restitution; it entails what art historian Kirk Savage has called a "therapeutic"

process, when discussing memorialization in the context of the US. In the German context the site is supplemented with a collective response, a broad sense of recognition provided by the state and its society that, according to Savage, responds to the victims' need to rebuild their sense of justice and order (107). Most importantly, however, the site invites a community to negotiate the past and to experience itself collectively through the act of remembering.

4.1.3 Third Phase: Towards a Final Concept – Official and Public Cooperation

By and large, the developments at the site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen provide a fitting example for the critical engagement of the public (and especially the former victims) with questions revolving around the ongoing interpretation of the GDR past. It also testifies to the importance of the public's active participation in making cultural memory. While some have overemphasized the role of the Federal Parliament in the "construction of [GDR] history...to forestall public amnesia in the face of yet another totalitarian epoch of German history" (Marchovits 515-16), the developments at the site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen shed a different light on the importance of the civil commitment to remember the SED-regime.

Certainly, the Federal Parliament played an active role in the attempt to come to terms with the SED-regime immediately after the wall had come down. The government in Bonn appointed two parliamentary *Enquete-Kommissionen* (in 1992 and 1995) and charged them with the task of deliberating upon long-term question of the GDR legacy. The commissions made suggestions regarding state-mandated project of coming to terms with the GDR past. However, the official acknowledgement of the state's responsibility vis-à-vis the GDR past should neither be confused with a mere "filtering [of] our knowledge of the past," nor with a one-directional and governmental top-down process of "laying memory tracks" for the sake of pushing "for that

version of the past” which best “advances the government’s interests in the present” (513). The memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen testifies to the notion of multidirectionality of memories. The involvement of various participants with various decision-making power and influence in the making of public memory proves to be key in negotiating the historical meaning of the site. This multidirectionality of memory also entails various and often wide-ranging interpretations of a past that ultimately stand in stark contrast with each other.

The spirit of cooperation between the state and the public, which we witness most in this phase of Hohenschönhausen’s memorial creation, manifested itself in the status of the victims as centerpieces in the *Auseinandersetzung* with the SED-regime. In cooperation with the expert commission, the Federal Parliament stressed the importance of integrating the contributions and opinions of all associations of former victims into the future memorial site (Deutscher Bundestag, “Zwischenbericht”). In this report, the *Enquete-Kommission* specifically addressed the site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and recommended a public foundation in the form of a *Gedenkstätte*, however dependent it would be for basic financial support on the federal government (Deutscher Bundestag, “Bericht der Enquete-Kommission”). Stressing the educational impact of the site, especially in the context of the democratic *Rechtsstaat* in unified Germany, the commission supported the victims’ plea to foster historical learning and reflection about the past by presenting the site as authentically as possible. The successful and still continuing tours through the complex by former detainees fulfilled the wish to present the past in this way, and unique expertise of former detainees has remained an integral part of Hohenschönhausen’s contribution to overall policy of coming to terms with the SED-regime.

4.1.4 Fourth Phase: Commemoration Institutionalization – Disputed Conclusiveness versus Authenticity

While the multidirectionality of GDR remembrance in the making of public memory is a crucial factor in the process of memorial creation, the disputed conclusiveness is another important aspect. Despite the decision to preserve the memory of the former *Stasi* remnant facility in Hohenschönhausen according to considerations of authenticity, debates over the feasibility and appropriateness of this policy remained. At the heart of the dispute is the difficulty that memory of the GDR state security apparatus and this facility, in particular, is both manifold and diverse. The attempt to translate such memories into a “memorial text” - as James Young has called it - brings together competing recollections that defy any final and conclusive notion of a “collective” or “shared” memory (viii-ix). While the cooperative interplay between official and public forces set the memorial site and its foundation on its way, its commemorative message was, and still is, disputed in both academic and public discourse.

Concrete reasons for the dispute can be found in the details of the memorial concept for the foundation *Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen*, which aims at the visitor’s identification with the victim subject position and thus intends to construct historical meaning solely based on highly subjective readings of the past. While this approach resonates well with the government’s policy of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which includes victims of the socialist state to give testimony about past injustice, it also encountered resistance with the public. Sociologist Anselma Gallinat points out that feelings of resentment towards a critical consideration of the contentious past in public discourse were triggered by the nostalgic reassessment of the past socialist state (344). This process, she writes, is coupled with a number of other factors that led

many to favor private and personal memories of growing up in East Germany over historical facts about the oppressive socialist state in their depiction of the GDR past (350).

Additionally, the voices of former GDR officials suggested a counter-narrative to the victims' interpretation of socialist injustice and, thus, reject the label *Unrechtsstaat* (unjust state) for the GDR. These officials challenge the testimonies of the former victims. According to those who had vowed to be the "shield and sword" of the SED party, but now have to cope with a severe *Biographiebruch*,⁸ the prisoners had violated GDR law and were thus correctly persecuted. The release of Christian Klemke's documentary *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit. Alltag einer Behörde* from 2012 further underscores that the voices of the perpetrators and their views on the GDR past are met with great interest and have entered the public debate. In fact, Gallinat herself experienced how one of her tours through Hohenschönhausen facility was shaped by the antagonism between an "argumentative visitor," as she calls him, and the tour guide, a former detainee: "Whilst most of us watch and listen finding it difficult to deal with what is presented to us, [an] argumentative colleague makes his criticism heard...He questions how reliable former prisoners' evidence could be. He also opposes the notion that the torture cells were used by the Stasi...Our guide grows more and more aggravated. Some of his remarks show that he considers the visitor to have been part of the socialist establishment" (352-53).

It is not surprising that the conflicts around the memorial concept of the *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* ranged from the decision about the appointed director of the foundation to wide-ranging political and ideological quarrels about the site's overall commemorative message. Thus, when historian Gabriele Camphausen was appointed director of

⁸ *Biographiebruch* could be translated as a disruption of or break with one's life biography due to the rapid change of state systems.

the site, former victims deplored the choice as not authentic enough. Camphausen's expertise on East European history, and particularly East Germany's communist past, could not outdo her biographical 'flaw' of being a former West German. Historian Hubertus Knabe, whose biography as a child of GDR refugees and anti-communists seemed to fit the commemorative agenda of the memorial better, soon replaced her. Knabe not only stands for an authentic representation of the wrongdoings of the *Stasi* and the SED-regime. He is well known (and highly criticized) for his accusatory and provocative stance regarding the oppressive aspects of the SED. One of his books entitled *Die Täter sind unter uns: Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (2007) accuses the state of sugarcoating the SED past and turning a blind eye to untouched former SED officials who seemed to have found happiness in reunited Germany. The book's title alludes to Wolfgang Staudte's film about the immediate post-war era in Germany *Die Mörder sind unter uns* from 1946, in which a former NS official responsible for the death of thousands managed to become a successful businessman in Germany's post-war society. While Knabe draws parallels between the *Aufarbeitung* of the past two regimes, he comes to the conclusion that reunified Germany has failed to do justice to the victims of the past regime and, by doing so, has also allowed the former GDR to gain *Kultstatus* (a cult following).

As director of the site in Hohenschönhausen, Knabe has developed a commemorative agenda for the site that echoes a return to the totalitarian paradigm of a number of conservative historians in the mid-1990s, a move that corresponds to the stance of the Kohl Government (Clarke 12). However, as a survey from 2008 shows, the emphasis on the totalitarian aspects of the former GDR did not bring the results the conservatives had envisioned. This survey found a general ignorance of the facts of political life in the GDR among sixteen-year-old-German students. In fact, students whose parents grew up in the GDR looked positively on the state

socialist system in comparison with the liberal capitalist democracy of the Federal Republic (Jones 211). Hohenschönhausen's cooperation with schools, teachers, and other educational institutions was one way to counterbalance this tendency. The *pädagogische Arbeitsstelle* (Education Services Office) at Hohenschönhausen, which works closely with students and teachers alike, hosts seminars, accompanies projects, and provides ample teaching materials (Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen).

And yet, the cornerstone of Hohenschönhausen's exhibition remains the site itself. Visiting the terrain of the former remnant facility means following the traces of those who had been imprisoned. The site represents its past without mediated material or additional explanation on moveable walls. Besides the material place as authentic site, the visitor also engages almost exclusively with tour guides, who are former detainees of Hohenschönhausen. The guides depend on the visitors' ability to feel empathetic and, to a certain extent, they develop *Mitleid*, a compassion for the suffering of others. This form of "mimetic encounter" (Jones 215) is also a biased encounter, as the site's critics have argued. It is a biased way to remember and educate about the past; and it stirred up conflicts that reached the highest political ranks.

The PDS - the successor party of the former SED and today *Die Linke* - voiced serious reservations about Hohenschönhausen's GDR remembrance, as its commemorative conclusiveness would aim at the blunt "defamation of the GDR" (Verheyen 170). This critique bears important political and ideological underpinnings, since *Die Linke* interpreted the shift towards a conservative paradigm of GDR remembrance as a wider strategy of de-legitimizing the GDR, which could ultimately spill over into a delegitimization of socialism per se.

The memorial concept that was chosen for the former remnant facility was and still is part of an academic debate on the commemorative goals and the instructive aims of the site.

Political scientist Sara Jones criticizes the *Geschichtsinszenierung* (staging of history) that ultimately renders the public no longer a spectator, but an alleged witness of the historical event. Pointing to the moral implications of such a commemorative approach, Jones identifies as the main problem the “inhabitation of other people’s memories *as* other people’s memories,” which could result in the “sense that one has gained a position of moral superiority in relation to this past” (217). While this ‘moral pitfall’ is certainly a problem, the discourse on GDR commemoration at Hohenschönhausen is exemplary of the multifaceted approaches to and the lively negotiated meaning of the GDR past in united Germany. Rather than claiming that the remembrance of the GDR has arrived at a stage where a Manichean configuration of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is applicable, the analysis of Hohenschönhausen as a case study suggests that both the multidirectionality and the consistently disputed - and thus deferred - conclusiveness over the meaning of the former communist German state are at work. The multidirectionality and the disputed conclusiveness allow for a plurality of responses to the GDR past, thus revealing different groups and participants struggling to assert their memories of the East German state and to translate their readings of it into cultural memory. The site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen is more than the mere imposition of *a* particular version of the GDR past and more than a political propaganda directed against the Left. Jones’ “inhabitation of other people’s memories” (217) could better be described as a *cohabitate* of GDR memories. It comprises a multitude of perspectives on how to understand this past that came to the fore in the debate about the site’s commemoration. The site is at the interstices of a demand for communicating personal memories and a refusal of embedding these memories in Germany’s post-wall cultural memory, which has a lasting form and is institutionally secured. The fact that former guards and *Stasi* officers randomly attend tours at the site and actively contest the narratives of the eye-witnesses (Gallinat

343-66) testifies to the notion of Hohenschönhausen as a co-habitat of multiple memories, which does not allow for the site to find any lasting commemorative form. The site Hohenschönhausen proves, however, the importance of the simultaneous engagement of multiple memories for shaping the way a society comes to think about its past.

Historian Jürgen Hofmann argued in an article in 1997 that the debate about the *Gedenkstätte* Hohenschönhausen has already necessitated its own process of *Aufarbeitung*. On the one hand, Hofmann criticized Hohenschönhausen's conceptional and methodological approach to the site's past as a means to demonize the GDR and foster an undifferentiated, uncritical, and unscholarly view of the past. On the other, he challenged *Die Linke* to prove the party's ideological renewal by facing the communist past and allowing for a critical dialogue about the wrongdoings of the SED and ultimately its place in Germany's commemorative agenda (115-16). Hofmann provided an important viewpoint on the future of the memorial site. He emphasized the necessity of thinking about Hohenschönhausen's commemorative role in the future and in an European context. The ongoing debate about Hohenschönhausen's commemorative agenda, which prohibits a final and univocal conclusiveness over the meaning of its past, is exemplary for the liveliness and multidirectionality of GDR memory. This memory opens up, rather than closes down, the discussion about a clear and widely accepted consensus on the meaning of the former communist German state. The intense and consistent public debate - as Hofmann had pointed out - bears the potential to result in the cultivation of shared memories about the past that might move beyond the German realm and help chart a broader productive commemoration of Europe's communist past.

4.2 A LINGERING COMMEMORATIVE UNDERTAKING: THE FORMER GDR PRISON FOR WOMEN *SCHLOSS HOHENECK*

I will now turn to another prison facility in the former GDR, which provides a different example for the difficult process of shaping a particular memory of the GDR into a memorial site: the former GDR prison for Women *Schloss Hoheneck* (Castle Hoheneck). In newspapers, press releases, reports, and documentaries, various expressions have been used to describe Hoheneck: daunting, horrific, breathtaking, historic, and eventful. And yet, it is difficult to locate the largest prison facility for women in the former GDR in Germany's commemorative landscape. Although the enormous castle towers over the idyllic landscape of Stollberg in the Erz Mountains of Saxony, its massive physical dimensions fall short of the commemorative significance that it could take on. This is not to say that the prison for women completely vanished from the radar of the public. The *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship), founded in 1998, lists Hoheneck in its brochure *Orte des Erinnerns - Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR* in order to provide a complete catalogue of Germany's monuments and memorial sites of the former Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR. However, the authors admit that the site's current status as a memorial site is disputed, and its future as a commemorative place remains uncertain (Kaminsky, *Orte* 371).

This might seem surprising at first. The case of Hoheneck prison displays structural parallels to some other important and politically charged locales of the former East German state, and especially the site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, which was transformed into a memorial site soon after the fall of the wall. In fact, some of the most important conditions for the process of memorial creation that I have outlined above are in place. We see here 1) an historically

significant site that is 2) recognized as such and has thus sparked public interest (especially in the form of various victim groups and other *Fördervereine*). Hoheneck is also a place that 3) allows for different approaches regarding the site's past, leading to 4) a lively discussion by various actors and participants about the commemorative meaning of the site. However, unlike the memorial site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, the remembrance of Hoheneck has not yet been 5) institutionalized. This means no broad consensus between state-officials and various public interest groups about the feasibility to create a memorial site has yet been achieved.

The castle itself is rich in 750 years of history. It has been used as a prison facility since 1861. Hoheneck gained notoriety as concentration camp during the NS-regime. During the time of the Soviet Occupation, the prison held more than 2,000 detainees. Later, Hoheneck became the most notorious prison for women in the GDR, at times housing more than 1,600 female detainees and the children born to them there (Heitmann). And yet, Hoheneck remains a commemorative place *non grata*. Its long and remarkable history has not yet found its way into official expressions of cultural memory.

As the creation of the *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* has shown, memorial creation and forming cultural memory into publically available symbols in Germany has always entailed a process of deliberation by multiple interest groups. No single group has unilateral authority in this process. In the example of Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, we have seen that grassroots initiatives and other activist groups have done much to draw attention to past events otherwise neglected by official forces. As for Hoheneck, the activist group of former female inmates, the *Frauenkreis der ehemaligen Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* has long been in place. The *Frauenkreis* was founded soon after the fall of the wall (Latotzky). This activist group of former inmates and their relatives is the driving force behind the attempt to spark the interest of

Saxony's state officials and the Saxon Memorial Foundation, in particular, to start the process of institutionalizing the commemoration of Hoheneck. However, if a memorial site like Hoheneck is to be included in the canon of official commemoration, it has yet to undergo a process of officially sanctioned political and aesthetic procedures. Unlike the site in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, the former prison seems not to conform to these procedures. Reasons for the ongoing difficulties regarding the site's commemorative future hark back to the conflict-ridden circumstances that seem to impede a fruitful dialogue between grassroots initiatives, state officials, and the current owner of Hoheneck. On a more general level, these difficulties reveal a lively discourse about GDR remembrance. But they also testify to a notorious ambiguity on the part of Saxony's state officials to condemn the former GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* or to address and commemorate the human rights abuses that took place at facilities like Hoheneck.

The contours of the contestational installation and critical public quality of memory culture in Germany becomes clear if we attend to Hoheneck as a case study and highlight the crucial moments in its history. Therefore, I will focus on five major phases: a phase of bureaucratic blindness and neglect, when Hoheneck continued to be a prison (1989-2001), a phase of privatization and commercialization (2001-2005), which resulted in an intensification of public debate, a phase of stagnation (2005-2010), a phase of reinvigorated critical engagement about its commemorative potential (2010-2011), and finally the claim of the public to execute its civic rights and officially remember the legacy of the prison. Hoheneck was added to the list of historically significant places in the foundation's law, the *Sächsische Gedenkstättenstiftungsgesetz* (Saxony's Memorial Foundation Law) in 2012 and was granted the prospect of receiving institutionalized support through the umbrella organization, the *Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten* (Saxon Memorial Foundation).

4.2.1 Phase 1: Bureaucratic Blindness and Hoheneck's Use as Prison (1989-2001)

The first phase comprises more than a decade. After the wall came down in 1989, the juridical status of the female inmates at Hoheneck was turned upside down. Arrested and held captive due to anti-socialist agitation and attempted defection, as it were, the women at Hoheneck and other politically persecuted GDR citizens became the focus of government attempts to compensate and rehabilitate the victims of communist injustice. With the *Erste* and *Zweite SED-Unrechtsbereinigungsgesetz* (First and Second Law for the Rehabilitation of SED-Victims), the 126 political prisoners of Hoheneck received amnesty. Left at the site were those inmates who had been detained for non-political reasons. Accordingly, the number of inmates for which the prison was originally designed could no longer be maintained. In 1990, the prison fell under the jurisdiction of Saxony's Justice Department. The grassroots initiative *Frauenkreis der ehemaligen Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* was founded only 16 months later, on April 26, 1991. It consisted of over 1,500 members. Like so many other activist groups, grassroots initiatives, and victims' associations throughout the former GDR, the *Frauenkreis* vowed to "preserve the memory of the most well-known and notorious prison for women of the GDR" (Latotzky). However, in contrast to the developments at the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, their appeal to close the prison facility and slowly convert it into a memorial site remained unanswered. Quite to the contrary, a department for male inmates was erected at Hoheneck and comprehensive reconstruction measures were taken in 1994. Until 2001, Hoheneck was listed as federal prison facility nr. 30461 Stollberg (Hoheneck), when Saxony's Ministry of the Interior closed the detention center. The remaining forty-four inmates were transferred to modern regional prisons. Until its final closure, only a memorial stone close to the facility reminded in very broad terms of the "Victims of Stalinism." The marker was erected under the patronage of

Stollberg's former mayor Matthias Wirth, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the *Frauenkreis e.V.* on October 28, 1991 (Kaminsky, *Orte* 371).

The decision to close the prison facility was not triggered by growing pressure from the former victims to honor their suffering at Hoheneck prison. Nor did it result from increasing public and official efforts to preserve remnants of the former SED-regime. Dr. Clemens Heitmann, the *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic) reflects in his article "Zu jeder Zeit ein Skandal - Über die Vergangenheit und Zukunft des DDR Frauengefängnisses Hoheneck" about the past and the future of the scandal-ridden prison. He indicates that the rationale behind its final closure was its deficient standard as a modern prison facility. Considering the claim, we must ask critically: why does the federal commissioner for the Stasi files, Heitmann, not mention in a single word that the time might have finally come to endorse the public endeavor to remember the facility as a site of false imprisonment, unjust suffering, and political oppression? This is not at all in line with the agency's mission to "teach the public about the structure, methods and effects of the Ministry for State Security [and to] cultivate critical public discourse about totalitarian ideas and structures by contributing publicly to the questions of coming to terms with the past" (Heitmann). While reflecting upon Hoheneck's troublesome history, Heitmann draws on a historic strategy of attacking the Soviet Occupation Force and subsequently the SED-regime for "ruthlessly ignoring the fact" that already the Nazis had used the prison facility - just like the concentration camps Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen - before being appropriated to incarcerate political opponents of the communist regime. It is striking that after Germany's reunification, Saxony's Justice Department, too, turned a blind eye to the site's

past and continued to operate the prison. As the official statement reads, Hoheneck was closed due to substandard conditions only eleven years later.

Characteristic for this phase is *bureaucratic blindness*: officials did not recognize Hoheneck as a remnant of great historical importance. On the contrary, Saxony's Minister of Justice, Steffen Heitmann (conservative Christian Democratic Union Party, the CDU) evaluated the potential of the site as prison as "nicht schlecht" and estimated that twenty million Deutsch Mark would be required for upgrading the facility to (former) West German standards ("Justizvollzugsanstalt Hoheneck wird modernisiert"). Until its final closure, the state invested nine million DM to keep the prison running (Schade)

Bureaucratic blindness entails a blindness vis-à-vis historical significance but also to the contemporary claims posed by individual citizens and organized groups. Unlike the developments at the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, the activist group *Frauenkreis der ehemaligen Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* was unable to make a strong enough case to draw attention to the site's historical significance in the attempt to address the GDR past and ultimately to launch plans for the creation of a memorial site right after Germany's reunification. Although the federal parliament of united Germany and the five new states in its Eastern part reached "consensus about a public duty to address, and possibly redress, the manifold issues of injustice and repression committed during GDR times," as the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* (Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Regime) claims in its 2011 report on "Coming to Terms: Dealing with the Communist Past in United Germany," the example of Hoheneck prison shows that the German federal government and the parliament have by no means been very clear in expressing the need for a "wide-ranging and intense effort by federal, state and local governments" (12-13) to reappraise the communist past.

In addition to bureaucratic blindness vis-à-vis historical significance, we also witness a tendency in the immediate post-wall years that led the Saxony's state officials place more emphasis on the practicality of the prison rather than on its commemorative value. During the immediate years after the fall of the wall, the need to restructure and transform the administrative, economic, and juridical sectors of the former East German state and thus to restore existing structures, such as prison facilities, seems to have had priority over the growing demand to preserve these structures to commemorate the former GDR and its abuse of state power. Saxony's Minister of Justice Heitmann even declared that Saxony's detention facilities were working to full capacity. A large prison facility like Hoheneck would have thus accommodated for these shortages ("Justizvollzugsanstalt Hoheneck wird modernisiert"). This explains the limited degree of attention that the officials devoted to the site with regards to its historical weight and commemorative value. The continuous use of Hoheneck as a prison facility resulted in a *willful forgetting* on an official level. On the one hand, the installment of a memorial stone close to the prison was a small, but important, step towards the acknowledgment of the victim's suffering at Hoheneck and showed that former victims and a small portion of the public continued to preserve the memory of Hoheneck prison. This small commemorative act also assured that the activist groups felt they were being heard. But it also served to placate the plea to close Hoheneck and start deliberations on how to remember the fate of political opponents to the SED-regime.

With the money spent to renovate Hoheneck in the 1990s, probably no one thought that the prison would be up for debate again very soon. But on April 14, 2001, the *dpa* (German Press Agency) released the news that Saxony's Justice Department had decided to close the prison after all. According to state officials, the conditions of the facility no longer conformed to

modern standards. The remaining inmates would soon be transferred to the newly expanded prison in Chemnitz (“Frauengefängnis kurz vor der Schließung”).

4.2.2 Phase 2: Privatization and Commercialization (2001-2004)

With the decision to close the prison, Hoheneck entered its second post-wall phase, which was characterized by the privatization and commercialization of Hoheneck’s past. After the prison was finally closed in April 2001, Hoheneck reemerged not only as a possible object to generate public memory but also to cash in on its commemorative value. The state of Saxony sold Hoheneck to a private investor two years later. This privatization derailed any deliberations about a memorial site, which could have involved multilateral interest groups at the time and become one of the greatest obstacles in charting plans for a future memorial site. This phase is therefore, also characterized by an intensification of *public contestation*.

The few weeks after the last inmates of Hoheneck prison had been transferred to different prisons, Stollberg residents were eager to look behind the infamous prison walls. Similar to the developments at the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen in the early 1990s, the public showed great interest when the state presented the prison. The decade long neglect of Hoheneck as commemorative object by state officials did not result in general obliviousness towards the historical significance of the facility for the region. Quite the contrary, hundreds of curious citizens waited outside to set foot on the infamous prison, which they were not allowed to approach during the GDR. On May 21, 2004 the television station *MDR* (Middle German Broadcasting Station) broadcasted the moment when Hoheneck opened its gates to the public for the very first time. The owner, Bernhard Freiberger, would use this footage later in his advertising film to prove to potential investors what a lucrative place Hoheneck could be. During

these days of irregular public accessibility, over 17,000 people witnessed the horrific conditions under which the former inmates served their sentences: poor sanitary arrangements, tiny prison cells, solitary confinement, the primitive medical wing, and the infamous water cell, where so-called uncooperative women had to stand in cold water for hours, and sometimes days. The strong public interest also resulted in a permanent exhibition at Stollberg's library (in place since October 2001), called *Politische Haft in Hoheneck* (Political Imprisonment at Hoheneck), initiated and organized by the Saxon Memorial Foundation and the *Frauenkreis e.V.* (Stadtverwaltung Stollberg).

In this phase, we recognize through the conditions in place with *Schloss Hoheneck* how public contestation confronts bureaucratic blindness to transform a location into a permanent memorial site. Activist groups, public institutions, the Memorial Foundation, and the public interest in the history of the site provided solid ground for possible negotiations about how to commemorate the legacy of Hoheneck prison at the very site. The highest obstacle to overcome, it seems, was officially institutionalizing the commemoration of Hoheneck and thus commemorating its past during both the NS-regime and the GDR. Although the Saxon Memorial Foundation supported the plea of victim groups and initiated a permanent exhibition, the site itself remained a *locus non grata* on the commemorative landscape of Saxony. The reasons for this can be found in the organizational and ideological underpinnings of official commemoration in the state.

In Saxony, the establishment and official recognition of an institutionalized memorial site depends on affiliation with the Saxon Memorial Foundation. As a governing body, this public foundation provides the legislative framework and regulates the organizational, administrative, and financial aspects of individual sites. The *Sächsische Gedenkstättenstiftungsgesetz*, which was

passed by the Saxon State Parliament on April 22, 2003, defines under §2 the foundation's mission to locate and support "diejenigen Stätten im Freistaat Sachsen...die an authentischen Orten an politische Gewaltverbrechen von überregionaler Tragweite, von besonderer historischer Bedeutung, an politische Verfolgung, an Staatsterror und staatlich organisierte Morde erinnern" (Saxony's Memorial Foundation Law). This broadly defined focus is due to the foundation's difficult task of commemorating crimes committed by both the NS- and the SED-regimes at a single site. The Foundation focus is "die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur und der kommunistischen Diktatur, insbesondere der SED-Diktatur, zu ehren, den Widerstand gegen diese Diktaturen zu würdigen sowie die Strukturen und Methoden der jeweiligen Herrschaftssysteme für die Öffentlichkeit zu dokumentieren" (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, "Zweck der Stiftung"). I will attend to this difficult task of seeking out historically significant places that account for the crimes of both regimes shortly.

The legislative text of the foundation stipulates places that fall under the jurisdiction of the foundation and thus can receive financial support from both the respective institutions and the state. This means that it is up to the ministers of the State Parliament - who, of course, rely on the opinion of the board of directors of pertinent organizations - to enact the legislative steps to add a site to the law and get the institutionalization of a site initiated. When the law was passed in 2003, only five sites fell under the category *historically significant*: Memorial Pirna-Sonnenstein, Ehrenhain Zeithain, the Münchner Platz Dresden, the Documentation and Information Center Torgau, and the Bautzen Memorial. Despite the ongoing public debate about Hoheneck's commemorative potential, it was not listed. The reasons can be found in the Foundation's need to focus its attention and resources on these particular sites. It also seems that the Bautzen Memorial in particular, which had already been established in 1993, represented a

site commemorating and recollecting the victims of politicized criminal justice during both the Nazi and SED era. Used as a prison by the Nazis and later as a Soviet pretrial confinement facility, Bautzen became the most well known prison of security in Saxony from 1956-1989 (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, “Gedenkstätte Bautzen”). It is also the most funded. In 2006, the Saxon parliament and the city of Dresden granted over 300,000 Euros for its reconstruction (Schneider). It is striking that on both the federal and state level distribution of resources force commemoration into a kind of *memory competition*, meaning that each site that has received public attention due to its significant history needs to present itself in a way that necessitates its consideration as a potential memorial site.

The case Hoheneck reveals a paradox in Germany’s and in Saxony’s commemorative agenda in particular. What is at stake here is on the one hand the difficult task of preserving the authenticity of a *specific* historical location - such as prison Bautzen and Hoheneck prison respectively - and to commemorate, honor, and inform about the uniqueness of the particular site. On the other hand, it is essential for a foundation’s commemorative agenda to extrapolate more universal issues and to exemplify relevant, overarching (historical) manifestations, such as political oppression, political resistance, the dangers of authoritative regimes, etc., and to devote the main financial resources to these sites. The case of Hoheneck reveals that contemporary Germany and especially the state of Saxony has been forced to ‘rank’ historical places according to the sites’ relevance to its commemorative agenda.

Accordingly, we witness a forced relativization of historical significance in the official decision-making process, which is mainly due to funding issues. Thus, memorial foundations, as executive forces, have to focus their attention and resources on only a few sites, rather than scattering the necessary resources for the sake of historical inclusiveness. The Bautzen

Memorial, it seems, has been given priority in Saxony's commemoration policy. The prioritizing of one site over the other reveals state rationality and economic policy as increasingly important factors for the making of cultural memory. During this period, we see that growing competition over resources led to a ranking of memories as "more or less important," preventing rather than expediting the emergence of a remembering community.

Another factor that forces individual sites into a *memory competition* is that each site has to be recognized as historically significant on a federal level. The State Ministry for Culture and Media focuses on only six memorial sites under the rubric *Inhaftierung und politische Justiz* (imprisonment and political judiciary), that are co-subsidized by the federal government. The federal subsidies are crucial for the creation and the maintenance of a memorial state. The Ministry for Culture and Media stipulates that the State of Saxony receives federal support for three of its memorial sites (which is more than any other federal state): Münchner Platz Dresden, the Documentation and Information Center Torgau, and the Bautzen Memorial. The federal support for the other three sites under this rubric goes to the state of Brandenburg (Memorial Site Sachsenhausen), to the state of Thüringen (Memorial Site Buchenwald), and to the state of Berlin (*Gedenkstätte* Berlin-Hohenschönhausen) (Neumann). Considering the ongoing conflict over its commemorative agenda and the highly disputed context in which it represents the former GDR, it is remarkable that Berlin-Hohenschönhausen is 1) the only memorial site representing the state and Germany's capital Berlin and 2) is federally supported. Even more important is the fact that Berlin-Hohenschönhausen is the only memorial site that focuses exclusively on the SED past of the site and made a decision not to engage with the site's past during the Nazi era when the main prison building housed a factory manufacturing supplies for the soup kitchens of the National Socialist People's Welfare organization. As mentioned above, the former detainees exerted a

main influence on this decision. They feared that, by comparison, their suffering could be diminished when compared to the overall weight of Nazi crimes in the national and international political and public discourse.

The other four memorials on the Ministry's list of funded sites have made it their difficult task to account for both pasts (the Nazi regime and the SED-regime) and thus to frame both eras under broader rubrics such as "political crimes [of] particular historical significance,...of political persecution, of state terror, and state-organized murders" (Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten, "Zweck der Stiftung"). A deeper analysis of these developments brings to the fore the difficulties of post-1990 Germany to cultivate what historian Bernd Faulenbach has called a common, but co-existing memory culture (16-18). The (seemingly) mutually exclusive terms "common" and "co-existing" refer to the status of the GDR commemoration in a now reunified Germany. While Faulenbach is convinced that the *Auseinandersetzung* with the GDR past has become an inherent part of Germany's memory culture and is thus confirmation of a well-functioning democracy, he also feels that the past experience with communism certainly ranks second behind the atrocities committed by the Hitler regime (17-18). The experience of two totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century poses the problem of juxtaposing, comparing, and often perceiving the Hitler regime and the SED-regime in an arranged hierarchy. With his plea to craft an all-encompassing commemoration culture, that on the one hand speaks to and is representative of contemporary Germany ("common") and, on the other hand, separates the two regimes and acknowledges them as distinctive and unique historical phenomena ("co-existing"), Faulenbach points out the difficulty that has come up in many academic debates. This discussion shows that Faulenbach assumes that a *German* commemorative culture is already in place, and now faced with the task of incorporating GDR remembrance into its commemorative grid.

However, Faulenbach fails to acknowledge that GDR remembrance has altered *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* and *produced* a German memory culture.

The experience of two totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century demanded a commemoration that could account for this distinctiveness, on the one hand, and acknowledge them as intrinsically connected, on the other hand. As for the commemoration of the GDR, this means acknowledging that Germany's decades-long political division was a consequence of Nazism. The GDR had its *raison d'être* in the partition of the post-Nazi state and was ultimately an effect of the Nazi past. This has a tremendous impact on the way reunited Germany officially interprets and deals with the legacy of the GDR. In their introduction to the volume *Orte des Erinnerns*, the editors underscore that the path to a *gesamtdeutschen Erinnerungskonsens* (all-German consensus on how to commemorate) is long and hard. For some, especially former West German liberals, commemorating the SED-regime as Germany's second dictatorship ultimately relativizes the crimes committed by the Nazis. For others, especially former GDR citizens, the need to come to terms with the SED-regime was seen as an attack on their biographies (Kaminsky, *Coming to Terms* 7).

There is, however, another crucial factor that seems to define the discussion about the *gesamtdeutschen Erinnerungskonsens*. It is remarkable that five out of six of the co-subsidized memorial sites by the State Ministry for Culture and Media (and, thus, by the federal government) are sites that address both the legacies of the Nazi and the SED past. The argument that the GDR has its *raison d'être* in the partition of a post-Nazi state and is ultimately interwoven with the Nazi past seems insufficient to explain that the state directs its commemorative attention to sites with historical significance during both the NS-regime and the SED-regime. These memorial sites, however, do not address the legacies of the 'two

dictatorships' equally. The commemoration of the Nazi regime is foregrounded, which seems to support the argument put forth by historian Jeffrey Herf that commemorating the Nazi era had a long tradition in the former East German state. According to Herf, fighting fascism still carries significant political and ideological weight. He notes that the 'antifascist' Communist regime and ideology allowed former East Germany to address the Nazi past with more confidence and to foster the notion of a communist regime as part of a larger democratic world fighting fascism. Thus, the official memory of the Nazi past in the former GDR drew on an intact antifascist political tradition that originated in the Weimar Republic and continued in emigration during the period of Nazi rule (Herf 4-13).

Commemorating Nazism through these long-established interpretive frameworks continues to have an impact on the post-wall commemoration of the former East in unified Germany. Saxony's emphasis on historically significant places that also include the past of the Nazi dictatorship is indicative of the continuation of the established tradition and its trajectory of a democratic antifascist movement. However, after the fall of the wall, this tradition had to be detached from its Communist focus, which meant breaking with the assumption that criticizing the regime would mean to "objectively supporting fascism" (Herf 13). The struggle to commemorate both dictatorships is the struggle of the former East to reevaluate its approach to the Nazi past and to come to terms with its recent history as a communist regime, which defined it in relation to Nazism. The way in which contemporary Saxony (and other former East German states) approach the legacy of the communist East seems to suggest that both historical eras (Nazism and Stalinist Communism) are intertwined and cannot be thought about separately. The case of Hoheneck shows that exclusive emphasis on the communist past does not conform to Saxony's post-wall commemorative agenda. The prison thus entered a phase that makes it an

example of the marketing of memory or marketing memorials as event. During this phase, the state of Saxony denied the site its rightful place as historical significant marker in its commemorative landscape.

As the property of Saxony, Hoheneck and the 53,000 square meter terrain fell under the jurisdiction of the state-owned enterprise *Saxon Real Estate and Property Management*. This organization's aim is to "optimize the usage of Saxony's landmass" and to "sell unused real estate" (Staatsbetrieb Sächsischen Immobilien- und Baumanagement). In June 2003, the Saxon Real Estate and Property Management sold Hoheneck to a realtor from the Saarland, Bernhard Freiberger, and his company ARTEMIS GmbH. According to the Saxon Memorial Foundation, Freiberger was contractually bound to provide up to three prison cells for "commemorative purposes." Although Saxony's Ministry of Finance attempted to impose the requirement to "honor the site's uniqueness and turbulent history," it is not surprising that this vague language immediately backfired (Simon). As the new owner, Freiberger declined offers to discuss the use of these cells with the foundation and the *Frauenkreis ehemaliger Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* (Latotzky). He chose instead to interpret Hoheneck's uniqueness in his own way. As the newspaper *Sächsische Zeitung* reports, Freiberger planed to convert Hoheneck into an automobile museum, a hotel, and a convention center ("Aus Gefängnis wird Museum").

In order to attract future investors, the ARTEMIS GmbH launched a short video on its website in multiple languages promoting the "unique possibilities" at a site with an "eventful history." Jumping back and forth between close-ups of the prison walls with barbed wire and locked-up gates and aerial shots of the "castle" at night, these images of Hoheneck underscore what the voice-over articulates: "Famous for its catastrophic conditions, this horror has a name...*Schloss Hoheneck!*" The mysterious, extra-diegetic music swells as the narrator briefly

sums up Hoheneck's history. All the important buzzwords show up to make the spectator believe that this site is truly an "eventful" place: Hoheneck as a medieval castle, the Nazis, the Soviets, the GDR and its State Security Apparatus. This list seems to suggest: if you want to experience the *important* history in one place, don't look any further! If the historical significance of the site has not yet convinced a potential investor, the video offers a sales pitch: How profitable is it to invest in Hoheneck, which lies "within the heart of Europe?" In order to answer this question seriously, the video best introduces a middle-aged man with grey hair wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase. As he opens his laptop, the view shows a graph with exponentially growing bars and unlabeled axes, seeming to chart infinitely increasing profit margins. As the spectator follows this businessman through the interior of prison, the narrator suggests that with "a well planned business concept," anything is possible: an event hotel, an automobile museum, conventions, a film location, or music events in the courtyard. The message is clear: "*Schloss Hoheneck* has opened its gates for you," that is, the video suggests, if you bring lots of money (Artemis GmbH).

While waiting for investors, Freiburger and the ARTEMIS GmbH came up with their own business idea. In conjunction with the village fair of Stollberg, ARTEMIS announced they would like to "return the castle to the city of Stollberg, since it has been a taboo for more than 150 years." The idea was to "satisfy people's curiosity" with an event entitled: "One Night at Hoheneck's Prison for Women." The event was to feature an overnight stay in a prison cell, prison food, music in the courtyard, a lightshow in the "mysterious prison hallways," and a play entitled "Being Imprisoned." To make this "jailhouse feeling," as Freiburger called it, even more "appealing," the ARTEMIS GmbH had already bought over 350 mattresses. In order to get the

most out of the 100 Euro fee, Freiburger invited his guests to “stay up and celebrate until dawn” (Schade).

These developments at Hoheneck received various responses. It revealed deep-seated conflicts within Germany’s memory culture. Not surprisingly, the idea to convert the former prison into an *Erlebnisknast* (event prison) caused an outcry from former victims, the *Frauenkreis ehemaliger Hoheneckerinnen e.V.*, the Victim’s Organization against Communist Tyranny, and the Saxon Memorial Foundation. The foundation published a statement, in which the assistant director of the foundation, Bert Pampel, not only criticized the current owner of Hoheneck and his business plan, but also the city of Stollberg and the state for having sold an historical site of such significance. Pampel underscored that the foundation never approved the privatization of Hoheneck and accused Freiburger of having betrayed his promise to “honor the memory of the former political inmates.” It is surprising, though, which inmates Pampel has in mind: “The event prison ridicules the victims; the victims, who were held captive by the *Nazis* (emphasis added)” (Schade).

What stands out here is Pampel’s emphasis on the time when Hoheneck was a prison for the victims of the Nazi regime. There is no mention, however, of the recent past of Hoheneck as a GDR prison where women were detained who up until this very day are fighting for a dignified commemoration of their suffering at the site. It is all the more surprising, then, that the assistant director of the Saxon Memorial Foundation, Pampel, merely emphasizes the importance of Hoheneck’s past during the Nazi era. His argument reveals once more how difficult the remembrance of Hoheneck is. It is unlikely that Pampel felt that the Nazi past of Hoheneck is the only past worth remembering. The foundation has done much to make the public aware of its past during the SED-regime as well. It seems as if Pampel desperately sought for more serious

arguments to avoid the degradation of Hoheneck to a “fun castle,” and thus evoked the NS-regime. The privatization of the former prison left the foundation as well as former victims, with only marginal influence to fight the plans to convert Hoheneck into a “*Spaßburg*” (Simon). As noted earlier, the remembrance of the Nazi past is significant for Saxony’s commemoration in the post-wall era. Pampel probably assumed that the commemorative climate necessitated this reference to the Nazi past at Hoheneck. Pampel must believe that his argument might help initiate a dialogue about creating a serious memorial site, which does not deserve to become a marketing tool for ‘historical events.’

In this discussion, we see how questions of memory, commemorative value, and historical meaning intersect with questions of affordability and funding. Stollberg’s mayor Marcel Schmid (independent), for example, endorsed the plans of Freiburger and the ARTEMIS GmbH. His major concern was the economic loss in the event that the investor turned his back on the entire project. For him, financial issues were inherently interwoven with the need to preserve the site. Accordingly, Schmid challenged all those who demanded a memorial site but were unable to provide the financial means: “If the investor leaves, Hoheneck will become a ruin in no time. With Hoheneck gone, what happens to its memory?” (Schade).

Certainly, the creation and subsequent institutionalization of a memorial site is very costly. The federal government, the state, and the respective federal institutions are important financial providers for a commemorative site. Now that Hoheneck is in private hands and no longer state property, it is - at least financially - out of the control of these institutions. The privatization of Hoheneck made every attempt to commemorate the site dependent upon the investor, his plans, and ultimately his money. We notice, however, that monetary difficulties were soon downplayed when Schmid drew on differing philosophies about *how* to commemorate

the site. Rather than stressing the dire financial situation and the absence of any productive conversations between owner, activist groups, and the Saxon Memorial Foundation, he claimed that the debate revealed a “generational problem” regarding the aesthetics of cultural memory. Bypassing the debate about financial issues and celebrating Freiburger as an entrepreneur regarding modern and unconventional forms of commemoration, Schmid blames others for their unwillingness to envision new ways of remembering: “The critics,” Schmid laments, “simply do not want to embrace modern commemorative forms” (Schade). With the investor “frustrated,” the victims frantic, the Saxon Memorial Foundation keen to take Hoheneck under its organizational wing, and the mayor confused about what a “modern way of coming to terms” could possibly mean, Hoheneck entered a phase that was characterized by years of stagnation regarding the site’s (commemorative) future (Schade).

4.2.3 Phase 3: Stagnation (2005-2010)

This phase of stagnation did not lead to a dead-end. Hoheneck did not fall into oblivion. On the contrary, this phase was crucial to a reevaluation of both Hoheneck’s cultural importance and the prison’s significance for the state of Saxony and for Germany’s cultural memory in general. This phase, which we might identify as *critical-historical distancing*, gave way to a new dynamic that helped reassess the possibilities of Hoheneck as a future memorial site.

Despite the site’s unofficial status as a memorial site, interested citizens were granted access to the prison upon request. Over 100 people per month toured the site (Simon). A few knowledgeable retirees - and former SED-regime critics - from the Stollberg community volunteered to show the facility (mostly to school groups) and to read from eyewitness reports by former detainees. However, during this phase (and unlike the beginnings of regular public

accessibility at the memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen) Hoheneck was never on the brink of becoming an institutionalized memorial site entrusted with the task to research history, to educate about political oppression, and to commemorate the suffering of political prisoners. During this phase of stagnation, the ARTEMIS GmbH continued to seek investors for the site, but without success. In an interview with the newspaper *Die Zeit* from 2011, Freiburger acknowledged that the phase of stagnation was necessary for him to understand “what Hoheneck actually means for these people [the victims]” (Simon). While he regretted hurtful phrases such as “jailhouse feeling” and “event prison,” he still clung to the idea that Hoheneck prison could have been a memorial site with an entirely new and unconventional concept: “We wanted to reach out to those who would otherwise stay away from memorial sites...Instead of narrating a story, we wanted the past to become more graspable.” For him, the only mistake was being unable to communicate this idea to the respective victims’ groups (Simon).

4.2.4 Phase 4: Reinvigorated Critical Engagement (2010-2011)

Given the distance of the critical-historical phase, a new engagement with the past as memory can emerge in which direct affectedness gives way to newly reinvigorated critical engagement with the past. Here though, with the example of Hoheneck, we recognize how memorial culture in Germany has become aligned with a new affective relationship to history. Sympathy, *Mitleid*, in German, literally a co-suffering in empathy with others, comes to characterize an appeal to the contemporary moment to experience its relationship with a past filled with atrocities and injustice. In 2011, Hoheneck prison reentered the public debate in a more serious manner. The twentieth anniversary of the *Frauenkreis der ehemaligen Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* provided an occasion to draw attention again to Hoheneck’s past from the point of view of former victims.

The *Frauenkreis* managed to invite (former) Federal President Christian Wulff (CDU) with the hope of initiating discussion about how to incorporate the site into Germany's commemorative landscape.

Although it was an honor to have Wulff attend the annual wreath ceremony at the memorial stone and take a tour through the prison, the *Frauenkreis*, and especially its spokeswoman Tatjana Sterneberger, evaluated his visit as long overdue. In an interview, Sterneberger stated that other memorial sites, such as Bautzen and Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, had received much more attention from state officials. Their visits to these sites gave the victims part of their dignity back. For Sterneberger, the lack of interest in former Hoheneck inmates, as well as the sale of the site to a private investor, reveals how little responsibility the federal state and the state of Saxony wanted to assume in this manner ("Wir sitzen jetzt auf der anderen Seite"). Even if Wulff's visit did not do much to change the situation of the former prison, however, the visit was a first signal of the site's cultural and commemorative importance. Furthermore, the ceremony attracted the attention of the public, the media, and, most importantly, it encouraged other former inmates to come back to the place of their suffering and join the collective endeavor to convert the prison into a memorial site.

The media attention Hoheneck received during this phase was crucial to kick-start new developments. Hoheneck attracted attention especially as a film-narrative. Already in 2010, filmmaker and West German script writer Kristin Derfler began shooting the fictional drama *Es ist nicht vorbei*, which Germany's well-respected public television station *ARD* first aired on November 9, 2011, the day Germany celebrated the twenty-second anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is difficult to place the film in a genre: a fictional (psycho-)drama that draws on real-life experiences of former inmates, presented in a fast-pace and action-packed manner,

which *Der Spiegel* labeled as “*Stasi-Thriller*” (Buß). Albeit fictional, Derfler’s narrative communicates a common fear of many former *Stasi* victims: to encounter those who worked for the regime and were never prosecuted or punished for their deeds.

In dark images, Derfler sets out to convey the feeling of injustice, helplessness, and anxiety in the former victims, who seem never to be able to escape their role as victims. Former East-German Anja Kling stars as Carola Weber, who served a two-year sentence at prison Hoheneck for requesting permission to leave the GDR. Ten years later, her husband Jochen (Tobias Oertel), a West German doctor, who knows nothing about her imprisonment, introduces her to his new colleague and chief physician, neuroscientist Dr. Wolfgang Limberg (Ulrich Noethen). Carola instantly recognizes his voice and believes he is the former *Stasi* physician at Hoheneck prison who drugged her with antipsychotics to keep the ‘uncooperative’ inmate calm. Since she never saw his face, however, she can neither identify Limberg as the doctor nor find proof to place him at the prison facility at the time of her incarceration. A cat-and-mouse game between former victim and perpetrator begins that leads Carola back to the site of her suffering. When the film ends, long-overdue justice comes to Limberg, who is arrested and Carola feels that she and the story she shares with so many others will finally be heard.

The film foregrounds many issues that seem to support the victims’ plea for the acknowledgement of their suffering, such as the hope that their voices are heard at a time when the “judicial coming to terms with the GDR seems complete” (Clarke 7). Nonetheless, the commemorative effort for neglected places and stories of persecution has not been pushed far enough. The film indirectly criticizes what had become the main obstacle regarding the work of the Federal Republic to secure persecution after reunification: *nulla poena sine lege* (no penalty without law). The Federal Republic was forced to regard actions taken in the service of the SED-

regime as essentially legal. Accordingly, there is a large gap between cases investigated after the fall of the Wall (over 62,000) and the small number actually brought to court (only a thousand) (Clarke 7). The film evokes this disproportion and works with the motif of revenge. Justice is bestowed in the filmic realm, even though it is out of reach in reality. During his visit at Hoheneck, Wulff, too, hinted at the illegality of actions during the SED-regime, which were clearly a violation of human rights: "It is important to hear the voices of the victims...It is appalling to come to the realization that so many who served the regime got off scot free...and do better now than those who they tormented" ("Wulff besucht Frauengefängnis Hoheneck"). With these words, Wulff again confirmed the shift from a juridical coming-to-terms with the GDR to the symbolical commemoration of the SED legacy. The film *Es ist nicht vorbei* still rehearses the idea of justice in terms of legal prosecution and invokes a sense of regained dignity for the victims.

Es ist nicht vorbei was nominated for numerous prizes (Grimme Preis 2012, Beste Europäische TV, Radio und Online Produktion 2012, Biarritz 2012) and attracted 5.58 million viewers (18.3% market share) (Brandes). Following its premiere, the ARD subsequently showed Derfler's thirty-minute documentary, *Die Frauen von Hoheneck - Ein DDR Gefängnis und seine Schatten in der Gegenwart*. Certainly intrigued by the *Stasi*-thriller over five million people stayed tuned for the first-hand experiences of women who spoke about their incarceration at Hoheneck and their difficulties in coping with its memory. Derfler attempts to regenerate the thriller-like atmosphere of the film by applying some techniques that remind the viewer more of horror films than of a documentary: still long shots of the prison facility with swelling music in the background are followed by unexpected, fast back and forth zooming. Hoheneck's prison walls literally vibrate in front of the spectator's eyes, resonating with Freiburger's evocation of

an ‘eventful’ historical place. In stark contrast to these images are the interviews with the former detainees. They sit in pedestrian living rooms with their hands folded in their laps. They speak slowly and softly about their time behind the prison walls. Unlike the heroine in the breathtaking and action-packed *Es ist nicht vorbei*, these women are far from chasing former *Stasi* doctors down to find evidence for the misuse of drugs on female detainees. For them, it will not come to a final showdown with a perpetrator.

The interviews of the documentary present the women in an ‘uneventful’ way, and yet the stories these women try to convey could not be more horrifying: the initial shock about their imprisonment, the separation from their families and children, the daily routine as detainees, the crowded cells, the cold, the unsanitary conditions, the foul food, the heavy labor, the humiliations, the punishments. Their pain is still visible, and the ongoing difficulty to live with this memory is graspable. They choke on their own tears when they talk about their adult children who were taken away from them and brought to orphanages, children whom they only saw again after reunification. Unfortunately, the happy ending to these stories is missing. A son of a former inmate summarizes: “Why the attempt to flee into the golden West?...The pain of feeling left alone and deprived by my parents is still there... Isn’t a mother supposed to comfort a child when it is afraid? I was always alone. In bed at night, I turned on my side, and I was alone” (“Die Frauen von Hoheneck”).

Although the documentary’s subtitle promises to examine the “legacy [of Hoheneck prison] in the present,” it does not go beyond the presentation of individual cases and the struggle to cope with the aftermath of imprisonment. Moreover, the documentary does not address the current status of the prison facility and the ongoing difficulties to chart out plans for a memorial site. It does nothing to call for more support, or at least to ask crucial questions about

why Hoheneck has not yet been officially incorporated into Germany's commemorative landscape. It remains unclear why this struggle has been going on for over two decades now and why the former victims have not yet received what most of these women during the interview directly address: the creation of a memorial site that would give their experiences and stories an official framework, permanently educate others about the unjust imprisonment, and a chance to win back part of their dignity. The documentary *Die Frauen von Hoheneck* seems content to elicit pity for these women, and the depiction of their experiences makes for very good TV. In other words, Freiburger's model of "event history" was realized through the media after all. When proposed as commemorative model at the actual site, it seemed offensive and encountered resistance. The sensationalist representation of the site in film, however, did not. Quite to the contrary, the film helped to bring attention to the cause.

The overall reaction of the *Frauenkreis der ehemaligen Hoheneckerinnen e.V.* to both the film and the documentary was positive. Filmmaker Derfler screened the documentary for the first time at the group's annual meeting in Stollberg in 2010. It received standing ovations according to the newsfeed of a privately run organization *Vereinigung 17. Juni 1953 e.V.*, a group that is determined to educate the public about the various freedom movements during the GDR and to contribute to the coming to terms with the legacy of the SED-regime, it thus works closely with the *Frauenkreis* (Vereinigung 17. Juni 1953). The *Frauenkreis* felt the filmic depiction of their suffering would certainly reach more people and draw the attention of a broader audience to the most infamous female prison in the GDR and the group's cause. This hope is understandable. A few months earlier and for the twentieth anniversary of Germany's reunification, the *Frauenkreis* organized an event that invited the public to a symposium featuring the stories of seven former detainees at Hoheneck. The event attracted only ten people ("Sie hatten nichts verbrochen").

Former president Wulff's visit, the media attention, and the film releases did much to generate more awareness of the site. It is also indicative for this phase that for the first time all the important interest groups seemed to communicate with each other at eye level. The willingness to chart out plans for a permanent memorial site and to debate funding issues brought together the investor, the mayor of Stollberg, as well as the representatives of the Saxon Memorial Foundation and the *Frauenkreis e.V.* According to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the idea of combining a memorial site that offers tours featuring former inmates with a forum, a *Begegnungsstätte* that encompasses lectures, exhibitions, films, and allows for research seems to resonate well with all parties involved (Van den Berg). The first serious obstacle, according to the article, was the formation of a new group, which claimed to take on the cause of the victims. This new *Förderverein Begegnungs- und Gedenkstätte Hoheneck* (Organization for a Memorial Site Hoheneck) was founded in the fall of 2011 by Tatjana Sterneberger. Sterneberger is a former Hoheneck inmate, who had organized president Wulff's visit to the facility a few months earlier. Their business location is in Berlin. The *Förderverein* had already submitted a concept that proposed a much broader take on the commemoration of Hoheneck: the establishment of a Saxon Academy for Research and Combating Extremism in Politics and Society. While the commemoration of Hoheneck's past is considered the centerpiece of the planned memorial site, the *Förderverein* envisions Hoheneck as a European *Begegnungsstätte* (literally a place to encounter and meet). This concept of the *Förderverein*, however, is still preliminary and lacks important details regarding its realization.

The *Frauenkreis* immediately opposed the formation of the *Förderverein*, as well as its preliminary ideas. That they were not invited to the *Förderverein*'s foundational meeting was only the first stumbling block. The reluctance to embrace these new developments and to

interpret them as beneficial to their cause points to a more fundamental problem. What is at stake here is not only the difficult question of *how* to represent the past of prison Hoheneck. It is also the query of who is (best) *qualified* to remember this past and *whose story* will be represented in its commemorative grid. It ultimately forced decision-makers to designate those *who* are allowed to put forth the ‘true’ reading of the past that will inevitably become part of Germany’s cultural memory.

4.2.5 Phase 5: Hoheneck’s Remembrance Institutionalized (2012)

The unexpected splitting-off of the hitherto cohesive *Frauenkreis* once again rendered the discussion about the site’s future difficult. It forced the Saxon Memorial Foundation to declare the *Frauenkreis* as the “only legitimate representatives of the former victims” (Van den Berg). This was probably in reaction to a statement released by the *Förderverein* in which chairwoman Sterneberger accused the Memorial Foundation of constantly wanting to control the developments and to interfere in public initiatives: “From the first day on,” Sterneberger laments, “the Saxon Memorial Foundation has resisted our endeavors...We have always been open for future negotiations with all those involved [and we] intend to give Hoheneck back into the hands of the citizens of Stollberg” (“Hoheneck: Zweiter Förderverein”).

The *Förderverein*, as self-declared vanguard of all public endeavors to convert Hoheneck into a place of commemoration, did not pull its punches. They not only campaigned against a radio report by *Deutschlandradio* (German radio station), which claimed that *Schloss Hoheneck* had become a “petrified” (*steingewordenes*) problem for Stollberg with no future in sight. The group also drafted a formal complaint against the chairman of the Saxon Memorial Foundation,

Siegfried Reiprich, urging him to refrain from telling lies about the *Förderverein* and its members (“Hoheneck: Zweiter Förderverein”).

What exactly these alleged defamations were is not clear. More importantly, the *Förderverein*’s reaction suggests a power struggle between activist groups and various institutions regulating commemorative articulations. The obscure case of the recently inaugurated Memorial Leistikowstraße Potsdam exemplifies this. The site commemorates a former Soviet remand facility that held between 900 and 1,200 prisoners through the mid-1950s. After the withdrawal of the last Russian troops and intelligence services in 1994, and with the help of committed citizens, the building at Leistikowstraße was made accessible to the public (Gedenk- und Begegnungsstätte Leistikowstraße). The opening ceremony for a permanent exhibition in April 2012 featured prominent guest speakers, such as Brandenburg’s Prime Minister Matthias Platzeck and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Bernd Neumann. However, the ceremony was overshadowed by the frantic protests of former victims who were not part of it. This protest marked the climax of a decades-long conflict between victim groups and the Brandenburg Memorial Foundation. The foundation was accused of not including the victims when launching plans for the memorial site. Also, since the Federal Government, the State of Brandenburg, the European Union, and the East German Savings Bank Foundation of the State of Brandenburg had donated financial resources for the site, the victims felt that they had little to no input in how the prison at Leistikowstraße should commemorate their suffering (Teuteberg). They felt left out and ignored. A recently founded *Förderverein* has now stepped in to mediate between the victims and organizational staff of the memorial site in order to deescalate a situation that had already caused an eighty-four-year-old man to attack and choke the director of the foundation, Ines Reich. Reich has also received numerous death threats (Berg). Certainly, the

animosities in the quarrels about Hoheneck's future were never this intense. However, both cases highlight the importance of fair dialogue in the process of memorial creation carried out with mutual respect and openness. What made the case Hoheneck even more problematic was the inability of the respective victims groups to resolve their difficulties. These unresolved difficulties weakened groups' ability to draw attention to the site in the first place and to present themselves as worthy dialogue partner with the institutions regulating commemoration. Unlike the activist groups that united for the common cause of advocating a memorial site Hohenschönhausen, the activist groups here continued to fight over the status of legitimate representatives of the site's infamous past.

Nonetheless, in March 2012, the ongoing debate about Hoheneck's uncertain future resulted in an important legal step toward its institutionalization as a memorial site. As a result of continued public interest in Hoheneck's past, Saxony's State Parliament proposed major amendments to the *Gedenkstättenstiftungsgesetz*. These amendments intended to include more historically significant places in the list of institutionally supported and funded sites through the Memorial Foundation. Various experts, chairmen of organizations affiliated with the foundation, as well as the director of the foundation, Reiprich, were invited to discuss the proposed amendments in parliament. While all representatives welcomed the proposal to add prison Hoheneck to the list of historically significant and authentic places of political tyranny, political persecution, state terror, and state-organized murders, they also stressed that financial support through the foundation required a well-defined concept as well as financial security of each individual site ("Protokoll"). This meant that the umbrella organization and, ultimately, the state would only subsidize memorial sites that present their own funding bodies, the so-called *Trägerschaft*, and are administratively organized. During the debate, foundation director

Reiprich underscored that mere inclusion of a site by the organization did not automatically mean its subsequent institutionalization as a memorial site. The conceptual and financial responsibility would remain mainly with local organizations (such as victim groups, *Fördervereine* etc.), the surrounding communities, and potential private investors. They must first secure so-called *Drittmittel* (additional funding) (“Protokoll”).

In addition to providing the prospect of future financial support, state-officials officially acknowledged the importance and indispensability of the victims in charting out plans for a future memorial site. The notion of consultation thus stands out as a key principle in the creation of a memorial site. The clear-cut distribution of (organizational and financial) responsibilities resonates with the overall understanding of the involvement of former victims, public initiatives, and activist groups, as pointed out in the debate. Both Prof. Wippermann, *Verband der Verfolgten des Naziregimes - Bund der Antifaschisten* (Association of Victims of Nazi Persecution - Association of Antifascists) and Dr. Kaminsky, the director of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED-Dictatorship, stressed the need to highlight the importance of the involvement of citizens and former victims in the revised version of the law. Prof. Wippermann states:

Ich meine, dass Gedenken nicht staatlich, von oben und durch ein Gesetz verordnet werden soll. Gedenken ist ein Bürgerrecht, das von den Bürgern wahrgenommen und ausgeübt werden soll, die sich dabei von den unterschiedlichen Opfern und ihren Verbänden sowie von unabhängigen Experten beraten lassen können. Noch einmal: Gedenken ist ein Bürgerrecht...und die Bürger und vor allem auch die Opfer sollen das so gestalten, wie sie wollen. (“Protokoll”)

This claim echoes what has thus far characterized the discourse about the commemoration of Hoheneck prison: that remembering is a civic right and should mainly be imagined, conceptualized, and carried out by the public. Former victims must play a special role in the

commemorative endeavor, since they provide a unique voice and function as consultants in the process of memorializing the past.

In January 2014, the *Förderverein* announced that the state of Saxony would provide another 700,000 Euros for the renovation of the prison facility. The total investment now amounted to over three million Euros and should provide regular public accessibility. On January 7, 2014, Saxony's state minister Markus Ulbig and Stollberg's mayor signed a contract for the "Ausbau der Gedenkstätte Hoheneck" in order to pave the way for a future memorial site ("Hoheneck auf dem Weg zur Gedenkstätte"). It is still up for debate how commemoration at the site will be presented. Negotiating its commemorative meaning must involve all those invested in the making of cultural memory.

4.3 CONCLUSION

During the period of reorientation in the early 1990s, the Berlin Republic undertook the task of carefully (re)defining Germany's post-wall commemorative agenda. While the federal government monitored the process closely and functioned as a major source for the financial security and feasibility for commemorative projects, the making of cultural memory took place among various actors and involved multiple interest groups.

The memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen is exemplary for a site that came into being due to a democratic process of negotiating cultural remembrance in a communal setting. Both officials and the public envisioned Hohenschönhausen as an important historical marker for Germany's commemorative landscape. Since the question of commemorating the past at the site was approached from a multi-directional angle, the process of creating a memorial site at the

former prison facility took over ten years. The memorial site Berlin-Hohenschönhausen is indicative for the complexity with which society constitutes itself as remembering and governing body. The development of a thorough concept for the remembrance of the prison facility involved many participants and required the careful weighing of various opinions. Striking a balance between a scholarly approach to the site's past and the individual memories provided by former detainees, the developments at the site highlight the democratic/communal nature of memorial creation. In its institutionalized form, the memorial site serves as an example for professional engagement with the legacy of the SED-past. At the same time, it provides a place where former detainees communicate their individual memories to a larger public, thereby experiencing recognition for their suffering and (possibly) making a first step towards their healing.

The largest prison for women in the former GDR, Hoheneck, is a unique example of how public initiatives, and especially former inmates, can claim the right to remember the legacy of the prison facility, despite the privatization of the property and bureaucratic blindness towards this memory in the early stages. It shows that the public can carry out cultural remembrance and shape cultural memory according to its imagination. With the late addition of the site to the Saxon Memorial Foundation list, Hoheneck prison has claimed its place in the commemorative landscape of Saxony and Germany. The inmates' incessant effort to draw attention to their suffering at the site, the public's continuous interest in the prison facility and its past, and the foundation's eventual commitment to start the process of integrating Hoheneck's past into Germany's official canon of regional and national cultural memory, had paved the way for the future institutionalization of the commemoration of Hoheneck prison.

The discussion has shown that a society - in this case *German* society - emerges through collective remembering and by translating memories into memorial space, making apparent the intrinsic connection between memorialization and socialization. Socialization occurs as a mnemonic process of continuously and communally disseminating meaningful relationships to the past in the present. The charting out of *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* in a society is a multi-facetted process, at times highly disputed, at times more conclusive. The dynamic aspect of how a society articulates a relationship to the past is captured in various cultural forms. They are all means by which social and cultural continuity is attained. Cultural memory reveals remembering as social interaction and, thus, as *Vergesellschaftung*.

5.0 CONCLUSION

As an intervention in the field of Memory Studies, I study how remembering East German Communism in the Berlin Republic constitutes the constellations of political, social, and cultural relationships to the past. The past as memory depends on present needs. It is articulated by sources in the present. I show that remembering involves complex interactions of various participants and a multiplicity of cultural artifacts. This makes remembering a contingent, changing, contested, and multi-faceted undertaking. Contrary to conventional wisdom, there is no national memory that would provide a 'true' or 'objective' reading of the GDR past, or any past for that matter.

In order to grasp the dynamic aspect of memory most effectively, I have strategically attended to a variety of artifacts and various modes of remembering. These include literature, film, and memorial. My dissertation has repeatedly revealed the importance of individual and collective efforts to bestow meaning on the past in the present moment. Memory, as the human practices of selectively recalling and filtering the past in the present, fulfills two essential needs for living in the present. On the one hand, it allows us to differentiate between past and present time. We access the past in the present through memories and establish a link between the two. On the other hand, memory also separates us from the past. It makes past experiences into a controlled reservoir for the present. We need to understand the act of recalling and filtering past experiences - both on an individual and collective level - a process that requires mediation. The re-embodiment and preservation of memory in the present occurs thus as cultural memory. By

studying the process of culturally mediated memory, we observe memory as social interaction. Memorialization is thus a means to constitute a culture of remembrance. The acts of memorialization are often presented as striving for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, meaning the transformation of remembrance into rituals, or merely performative gesture in the present that aim at lifting the burden of the past from a remembering society. This notion of memorialization, however, threatens to ossify the past, making it impossible to see how past experience are continually renegotiated, transformed, and needed in order to respond to present needs.

Thus, cultural memory is not so much the fixing of memory for the sake of giving past experiences a definite, conclusive, and irrefutable meaning, but rather dynamic and contestational process. As such, it constitutes society and brings individuals into communication *as* society. The different modes of remembrance that the artifacts under discussion display point to places of mnemonic debate and contention that show the liveliness of a society, its constitution as a collective, and its contentions. By understanding memorialization as the articulation of this dynamic, we are able to observe and describe how a society experiences itself as a remembering collective - in this case a German collective. Memorialization makes apparent how society arises and experiences itself in its remembering and underscores how remembering (as an experience in itself) offers society an experience of itself.

The objects of analysis in this dissertation highlight the importance of memory in the process of individually and collectively negotiated retrospection of the GDR past. As the analysis has shown, these objects do not recall the past through memory in order to overcome or master a troubled history. Instead, and along with debates they have ignited in German society, they reveal that a remembering society continually establishes itself as it redefines its relationship to the past. Thus, the exploration in this dissertation of remembrance in cultural artifacts does not

seek to rehearse the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (a mastering of the past), but challenges a society to reinvestigate its *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* (relationship to the past).

My dissertation has sought to enrich the discourse about *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by introducing the term *Vergangenheitsbeziehung*. In the contentious debates around new memorial practices in the Berlin Republic, we have seen how *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* emerge through a collective engagement with the past in the present. While *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* distances the past from the remembering society, calling it “overcome” and, thus, foreclosing its immediacy in the present, *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* draw the past closer to the remembering society, not for the sake of yoking it under an historical burden, but utilizing the past to investigate the circumstances of the present moment. *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* capture remembering as a continuous engagement with the past, able to bestow new meanings on past experiences in the present. *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* are thus indicative of a social dynamic that emerges through a collective and disputed engagement with the past. The emphasis on the relationship to the past renders memory a crucial catalyst for societal and cultural reorientations in the present. These relationships help chart out paths into the future. Through this study we can gain an understanding of the liveliness of a society and its constitution as a remembering collective.

The objects under discussion in this dissertation span a period of twenty years. It would go beyond the scope of my project to include and account for all possible commemorative undertakings that have shaped Germany’s commemorative landscape two decades after the fall of the wall. The selected objects, however, demarcate crucial commemorative moments and trends in post-wall Germany. They allow us to observe how GDR remembrance has developed in Germany’s cultural spaces as a substantial means to respond to socio-political and cultural needs

in the present. My objects are indicative of and bespeak significant moments where we see society emerge through collective remembering. They capture the dynamic with which German society is continuously scrutinizing its relationship to the past to articulate an *Erinnerungskultur*. Thus, my objects reveal remembering as social interaction and allow us to describe remembering as acts of *Vergesellschaftung*, or sociality. Akin to Georg Simmel's understanding of *Vergesellschaftung*, memory appears as the moment of sociality when remembering instantiates and results in a reciprocal relationship between individuals and social groups in which remembering is performed and translated into form. The dynamics of memory make society possible and, conversely, society makes memory *erfahrbar*, meaning memory is experienced socially.

This dissertation began its analysis by looking at literary responses to the GDR past. As a storing device, literature has a long (if not the longest) tradition as a material and medial artifact to record knowledge, reflect on, and help constitute a culture in which texts are received, discussed, and acquire meaning. Literature continually re-writes, re-transcribes, and re-envisions its own culture. Its ability to recall the past, to describe it, and to present various view of the past makes writing a commemorative undertaking that is both an act of individual remembrance and an active engagement with a remembering culture in which both writer and text are constituted.

Wolf's work, in particular, allows for an investigation of the dynamic role of literature and memory. Her novella *Was bleibt*, and the subsequent *Literaturstreit* dominated post-wall cultural debates in united Germany. These debates largely determined how the cultural legacy of the GDR would be treated in the Berlin Republic. However, and perhaps more significantly for this investigation, Wolf's entire literary oeuvre was marked by an exploration of the individual in its relation to collective memory. Furthermore, in *Was bleibt* and the novel *Stadt der Engel*, Wolf

explicitly pointed to the significance of literature for coping with the historical legacy of the SED-regime. The chapter, thus, showed that the significance of literary memory is due to the medium's ability to communicate personal experiences and make these personal experiences relevant to a larger collective. I did not, however, investigate individual versus collective memory. It was not concerned with the writer's individual psyche in collective conflict over memory. It rather showed how individual and collective remembering reciprocally produce one another.

The dominant mode of remembrance in literature is what I have called *mnemonic self-exploration*. This mode appears as the internal investigation of past experiences, which becomes applicable to a larger collective, revealing personal memory as both self-referential and reciprocal in its relationship to the collective. The method of presenting a narrating self that is in constant dialogue with itself and its environment transgresses the time-bound experiences of a remembering subject. Here we see how literature can provide a setting in which an individual and a larger collective are challenged to rethink and articulate new *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*. The mode of *mnemonic self-exploration* gave rise to an understanding of memory as both process and interplay between individual remembering and collective remembering. In literature, it thus expands the limiting circumstances of subjective experiences and opens them up to a socio-cultural context in which these experiences assume new meanings.

In Wolf's *Was bleibt* and the debates it ignited, we see the dynamics of memory unfold during a period of political and societal reorientation in the early 1990s. The legacy of the SED-regime and the question "what remains?" immediately became the responsibility of a larger collective. This responsibility moved between the interests of the state, which established the parameters for an official *Vergangenheitspolitik* via the two *Enquete-Kommissionen*, and the

civil society. In literature, and the case of Christa Wolf in particular, we see how individual articulations of past experiences are intrinsically bound to institutional, social, and cultural interests. The analysis of *Was bleibt* and the discussion of the German-German *Literaturstreit* captures the dynamic of literary memory as an important vehicle to scrutinize the socio-cultural context in which the text circulates and acquires meaning according to pressing issues of the present.

GDR remembrance in *Was bleibt* helped close gaps in historical knowledge about the GDR. It also ignited a discussion about moral deficiency, culpable behavior, and personal accountability. On the one hand, memory in *Was bleibt* was understood as historical material documenting the restrictive cultural policy of the SED-party during the late 1970s. On the other hand, it appeared as a narrative of imagination, anticipating socialist alternatives as a political goal for reforming the state at a time when the political future of the GDR was in limbo. Placed in the context of the 1990s, the literary articulation of past experiences was received differently in light of the changing political and social circumstances. The commemorative function of texts had shifted, since it now served as crucial vehicle to discuss pressing issue in the present. *Was bleibt* thus appeared as a self-accusatory revelation of the morally ambivalent role of East German writers. Memory in the text oscillated between an individual account of past experiences in the former GDR and the re-conceptualization of the collective self-image of left and liberal intellectuals. The discussion of *Was bleibt* showed how literary memory can scrutinize and establish a dynamic link between the relationship of writing and personal accountability, cultural production, and historical morality. The *Literaturstreit*, in particular, indicated a rethinking of *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen*, but not only with regard to the East German past and the reexamination of the paradoxical role of writers in an authoritarian regime. It also revealed how

the recalling of the past in literature could necessitate a reassessment of the literary and cultural development in both Germanys since the end of World War II.

In the discussion of Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel*, we saw that memory is selective. Recalling and filtering the past means suppressing memories that are not useful, insignificant, or even perilous for a meaningful life in the present moment. Such suppression of memories results in the conscious or unconscious "forgetting" of past experiences that puts an artificial distance between our present and past selves. However, suppressed memories can also be retrieved. I identified the dynamic of social interaction as the driving force for instantiating individual and collective remembering. This dynamic then triggers the retrieval of previously "forgotten" memories. Interaction with the individual's socio-cultural milieu compels her to remember, and conversely, allows her to forget.

With the passing of the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz* (*Stasi* files act) of 1991, which made files generated by the infamous State Security apparatus of the former GDR accessible to the public, we see a moment in German history where an official effort to bestow transparency and a sense of unrestricted engagement with the *Stasi* past resulted in the forceful confrontation with the past. The *Stasi* files act compelled new forms of collective recollection. The availability of these historical documents and the public upheaval they caused forced individuals (like Christa Wolf) to remember this legacy, resulting in the exposure of the 'faulty' psychological apparatus of individual remembering, which initially suppressed these memories. Once acknowledged as significant for collective memory, the raw historical material that these documents brought to light, was subject to mnemonic negotiations. The files thus emerged as historical testimonies for those who suffered through the acts of the *Stasi* and likewise became moral indictments for those who were associated with the incriminating actions of the state apparatus. The collective

recognition of the significance of the files resulted in the compulsion to revisit repeatedly this past in mnemonic practices.

Almost twenty years after the *Stasi* files act, Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel* presents a moment of critical engagement with this legacy. Wolf/her narrator is compelled to remember her past as informal member of the *Stasi*, exposing her individual memory as deficient in articulating a meaningful relationship to a shameful past. Her scrutinizing of psychological *Verdrängungswiderstände*, however, becomes an act of individual resistance regarding the compulsion to remember this past repeatedly. The mnemonic dictate of a *mea culpa*, which became the dominant mode of remembrance regarding the involvement with the *Stasi*, is counteracted in the novel. Wolf brings closure to the past, but not by adjusting her personal memories so that they would recall it as 'wrong' or morally condemnable. This would mean relegating personal responsibility to a larger collective and its commemorative acknowledgment of the incriminating behavior of the *Stasi* and its supporters. Instead, Wolf/her narrator provides an example of the efficacy of escaping the dictate of memory. The novel shows that resistance to obsessive recollection enables us to condemn memories. However, this is only achieved by making the past a meaningful part of the present self. Only then does the continuous recalling of the past (on both the individual and collective level) become redundant, significantly, this moment also marks the beginning of forgiveness, redemption, and healing.

In both time periods, then (the early 1990s and in 2010), literature utilized memory to anticipate a livable future. Historical thinking in literature occurred as the interplay between experiences (of the past) and the charting out of expectations (for the present and the future). In the mid-1990s, however, and through the medium of film, we noticed a countertrend that turned back to the past.

The second chapter showed how early filmic responses to the GDR past helped to explore socio-political developments after unification and, thereby, participated in the commemorative appraisal of recent historical events. One of the earliest contributions that addressed the *Stasi* past (Schönemann, Gräf, Beyer) was in accordance with the political sentiment of the time, which emphasized the oppressive nature of the SED-regime. In the early 1990s, the majority of films that engaged with the GDR past received limited distribution due to the rapidly changing condition of film production after the fall of the wall. They remained at the margins of the cinematic landscape and received little to no attention. This made it initially difficult for film to be recognized as a critical voice in the discussion about the GDR past. However, by the mid-1990s, film had become a significant medium for GDR remembrance in the Berlin Republic. Regardless of the commemorative approach chosen by post-wall films (some humorous and light-hearted, others more critical, pessimistic, or even mournful), film's commemorative potential lay with the ability to recapture what was irretrievably lost: past time. While the second *Enquete-Kommission* (1995-1998) sought to formulate official guidelines for *overcoming* the consequences of the SED dictatorship, the commemorative focus of film was not yet on overcoming, or leaving behind, the past. Quite the contrary, film offered the possibility to visualize and reconstruct the past, making memory visible, graspable, and immediate. By providing imagery of the past and staging memory on screen, film seemed to cater to the need of many former East Germans who felt their historical experiences and former lives had been swept away by the rapid transformations of the post-wall period.

The evocation of 'pastness' on screen triggers emotional responses in viewers that other commemorative media do not provide. The success of films in affectively staging the past testifies to the emotional power of remembering. The truthfulness of past experiences, according

to this model, is neither objective nor measurable. Instead, the most dominant, persistent, and ‘true’ memory relates to what Christa Wolf called “Gefühlsgedächtnis” (*Was bleibt* 43). This *Gefühlsgedächtnis* shows the limitations of perceiving (historical) time as the consecutive arrangement of sequences, measurable by their duration and linear succession. The mechanisms at work in cinematic remembering, by contrast, disrupt the linear flow of time. Memory in film grants any historical event more ‘durability’ and ‘permanence’ over another, challenging the linear understanding of (historical) time.

The durability and permanence of past time is sustained by memory and the emotional attachment to the past. The inseparability of emotions related to past experiences made attempts to compartmentalize, categorize, or commemorate the past according to broad rubrics difficult. When in 2005 the Sabrow Commission suggested promoting commemorations by establishing a connection between *Diktaturgedächtnis* (memory of oppression), *Alltagsgedächtnis* (memory of everyday-life), and *Arrangementgedächtnis* (memory of accommodation), the commissioners tried to account for the vastness of memories and emotions that came to denote the GDR past (Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern 19). The failure to implement these recommendations, however, highlights even more the importance of film in providing a commemorative conduit able to account for this vastness.

In the mid-1990s we notice a proliferation of films that explored less and less the difficulties of a society in transition, but rather returned to or even celebrated the everyday-life in the former GDR. Long before museums (like the DDR Museum in Berlin) or retail businesses would cater to this desire, the emotional investment in the past was captured and discussed in film. The *Ostalgie* wave came to full fruition in film with blockbuster hits like *Sonnenallee*, *Helden wie wir*, or *Good Bye, Lenin!*.

The two films under discussion in my dissertation pushed the debate about GDR remembrance in film to a new level. Both *Wege in die Nacht* and *Das Leben der Anderen* responded to film's central role in depicting or celebrating life in the former GDR (*Ostalgie*), as well as its ability to trigger affective responses in viewers. *Wege in die Nacht* has a resolute focus on the present. The film seeks to depict the impenetrability of past time that is devoid of meaning until it is bestowed on it from a present angle. It is concerned with the difficulties of social transformations in the present in light of past experiences and suggests that moving forward into a brighter future requires confronting unresolved issues from the past in the present. Unlike *Ostalgie* films, *Wege in die Nacht* does not yearn for a past that has been lost. This, according to the film, would mean retreating from present concerns and ignoring the need to collectively negotiate meaningful relationships to the past in the present.

The *elusive mode of remembrance* in *Wege in die Nacht* explores past experiences, but eludes the emotional responses that occur with the depicting of the past and that might block the critical view onto present needs. That the viewer does not develop an emotional attachment to the film's protagonist Walter allows for a critical distance between the viewer and the problems presented on the screen. This distance, the film suggests, is necessary to identify problems (such as Walter's inability to free himself from past authoritative structures) and to contemplate possible solutions.

Unlike the literary mode of mnemonic self-exploration, through which the *past* becomes accessible and communicable to others, the *elusive mode* of remembrance undertakes mnemonic self-exploration by focusing exclusively on the present. Here, the ruin establishes a link to the past that represents the transition to the present. It suggests that the past is irretrievably lost and will never take its previous form again. As an image of destruction, the ruin does not indicate a

radical break with the past. Instead, it points to the continuity and constructedness of historical time and meaning, which also invokes contemporary psychological discussions of memory. The image of the ruin resembles the workings of memory. Whenever we gain access to the past, we do not find an intact, complete, and conclusive 'object.' Like the ruin, memories are fragments. They change each time they emerge and acquire different meanings, making new *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* possible and desirable. The ruin thus becomes an image of the transformability and malleability of our memories. Both the ruin and memory function as building blocks with which we reconstruct the past in the present moment.

Das Leben der Anderen was released at a time when the political climate in the Berlin Republic exerted a great influence on GDR commemoration. The appointment of conservative Christian-Democrat Bernd Neumann as commissioner for Cultural and Media Affairs in 2005 brought back a more radical view of the GDR past that battled nostalgia, *Ostalgie*, and positive memories of the GDR. Neumann's appointment was a countermeasure against the growing popularity of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, today *Die Linke*), the successor party of the SED. With 8,8%, the PDS doubled its seats in the *Bundestag*, emerging as the fourth most popular party in Germany's political landscape (Zicht). While it did not come to fruition, the threat of a left-left coalition proved alarming to the Christian-Democrats, who readily formed a grand coalition with the SPD. In this time period we see how changes in the political landscape intensified the debate about GDR remembrance, resulting in a continued public contestation about the meaning of the GDR past.

While this was most notable in the developments at the site Hoheneck, film as cultural media also responded to the changing commemorative climate. The strong emphasis on the pervasiveness of dictatorship compelled cultural media to investigate more the oppressive nature

of the SED-regime. The example of *Das Leben der Anderen* shows that the *assertive mode of remembrance* assumes a certain responsibility towards the past. The general understanding that past injustices should be remembered collectively insists on remembering as a moral imperative. We were able to observe this notion of individual and collective responsibility towards the past in the case of Christa Wolf and the *Literaturstreit*. Whether or not we agree with this understanding of memory and morality, the study of film as a mass medium enables us to investigate further how remembering for a larger collective body becomes a responsibility.

Responsibility entails the acknowledging and acceptance of past wrongdoings and taking of responsibility. Accepting responsibility is reactive. It merely admits past wrongs. Taking responsibility, however, is proactive. It remembers in order to creatively devise ways of establishing a meaningful relationship to this past in the present (Blustein 34-41). Since remembering is governed by ethical norms, the assertive mode assumes the role of doing justice to the past. This bears the risk of providing, or even, imposing an interpretation of the past in conclusive ways, rather than demanding an interpretive act that can be generally associated with remembering. *Das Leben der Anderen* undertakes a moral judgment of the past and is thus able to assess the GDR past as 'evil' or 'wrong.' While it accepts responsibility towards this past, it is unable to take responsibility. The assertive mode of remembrance in the film does not pose ethical questions to which the collective (i.e. the viewers) responds through interpretive engagement with what has been remembered (on screen). By asserting a straightforward, singular proposition, the film relieves the viewer from taking responsibility and thus obstructs the work of memory. Memory work entails an ethical component, which should not only result in the acceptance of past wrongs by simply stating how 'wrong' it was or how the past 'should have been.' The dynamic and contestational nature of memory work also means the conscious

taking of responsibility toward the past, i.e. feeling responsible for it. Remembering and taking responsibility collectively make the past an affective experience that aims at establishing of a relationship to the past that is important to our common humanity.

The third chapter showed that the commemoration of the GDR past in the Berlin Republic continues to have political significant and elicits public concern up until today. The difficult process of translating GDR remembrance into cultural memory is particularly noticeable in the creation of memorial sites. The discussion about the two sites in Hohenschönhausen and Hoheneck pointed to and examined significant phases, in which the contestational nature of memorialization became most apparent. By exploring memory through memorialization, we were able to identify cultural memory as a collective process that remains disputed and is often inconclusive.

The two sites in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and Hoheneck revealed that cultural meaning derives from the participation of various individuals. Both sites displayed an immediacy of social setting and communal moment, highlighting a thoroughly mediated relationship between the past and those performing acts of remembering in the present. As external articulations of communally negotiated views of the past in the present, Hohenschönhausen and Hoheneck make apparent the intrinsic connection between memorialization and socialization. The developments at the respective sites show how society arises through collective remembering and how remembering offers society an experience of itself. Hence, in all objects that this dissertation discusses, we see that socialization occurs as a mnemonic process of continuously and communally disseminating meaningful relationships to the past in the present.

The charting of *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* constitutes society and brings individuals into communication *as* society. We were able to observe the link between memory and

Vergesellschaftung or *Vergesellschaftung* through memory, at distinct points in time through the examples of literature and film. The decade-long process of memorial creation and the continuous dispute over the conclusive meaning of the GDR past has shown that memorial sites in particular embody the contestational nature of memory over the meaning of the ‘present past.’ *Vergesellschaftung* through collective remembering is captured in the nomenclature of memorial sites. Most sites are *Gedenk- und Begegnungsstätten*. *Gedenken* is achieved when the sites are - either immediately (Hohenschönhausen) or over a long period of time and with much difficulty (Hoheneck) - identified as important material reminders of the past. As the discussion of the two memorial sites in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and Hoheneck has shown, *Gedenken* is secured 1) through financial support guaranteed by the federal and city governments and the institutionalized support of public foundations (*Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin Hohenschönhausen*) or other umbrella organizations such as the Saxon Memorial Foundation (Hoheneck). *Gedenken* requires 2) a critical and academically informed examination of the sites’ history. *Gedenken* takes place 3) by emphasizing the authenticity of individual sites. This does not only mean the preservation of the sites’ material history. With the commemorative focus on honoring and remembering the victims, *Gedenken*, and thus cultural memory, is dynamic, lived, and communicated by people, whose memories are conveyed in form of oral history. This makes victims an indispensable part of memorial creation in the Berlin Republic.

The significance of former victims and the formation of activist groups are apparent in both examples. In memorial creation, individual remembering is an important historical (re)source. As *Zeitzeugen*, the former victims communicate memories (orally and in written form). A larger community, however, is necessary to instantiate collective remembering through a shared compassion for the suffering of others. A *Gedenk- und Begegnungsstätte* thus invites a

community to remember the past collectively and affectively. A society “*begegnet sich*” (meets, encounters, faces, confronts itself and its past) in its remembering and thus experiences a sense of itself as a remembering collective.

In both examples, we saw how collective memory is subject to and often impeded by memory politics (such as the problems of juxtaposing, comparing, and establishing a hierarchy between the memory of Nazi- and the SED-regime), bureaucratic blindness (the official neglect of historical significance and/or victims’ claims), and memory spectacle (the attempted sensational staging of history in the case of Hoheneck). And while all these factors contribute to a certain inconclusiveness of cultural memory, they are also indicative of the continuous and collective effort to articulate and communicate *Vergangenheitsbeziehungen* in the present and through acts of memorialization.

Studying various modes of remembrance has brought to the fore the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of memory that constitutes a society and reveals a disputed inconclusiveness in cultural memory, making it impossible to grant the GDR past one definite meaning in the present. For many scholars this inconclusiveness endangers the future of Memory Studies. Foreseeing the end of Memory Studies, historian Gavriel Rosenfeld maintains that the inconclusive meaning of the past points to the impossibility of mastering it. He believes that memory, as driving force for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, will eventually exhaust itself and lose its position as an influential field of interdisciplinary scholarship (122). Sociologist John Torpey, on the other hand, acknowledges the importance of Memory Studies in bringing the theoretical possibility of mnemonic closure to the past. Using the example of contemporary Germany and its “success in coming to terms” with the Nazi past, Torpey suggests that Germany

has essentially “set a standard of reckoning with the past,” bringing an eventual end to the recent occupation with memory (2).

This dissertation has shown that the case of Germany and its turbulent history in the twentieth century incite us to discuss the potential of Memory Studies not in terms of “success” or “failure” in mastering the past. Rather, this study compels us to consider the mnemonic engagement with the past as the articulation and inscribing of collectively deliberated and often disputed *Vergangenheitsbeziehung*. *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* allows us to establish a critical relationship to the past. It neither aims at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, nor does it want to set standards for how to remember the past ‘appropriately.’ Instead, *Vergangenheitsbeziehung* reveals the dynamic aspect of memory as a discursive concept that prevents a monolithic fixation of one final and absolute vision of the past. It has become evident through this dissertation that memory is a process through which the past acquires new meaning and is shaped through remembrance and according to present needs. The process of memory, its vitality and dynamic, results from social interactions that instantiate individual and collective remembering and are graspable in mnemonic practices. Remembering as a performative cultural practice is a form of *Vergesellschaftung* from which a culture of memory can be inferred. Thus, cultural memory makes visible how remembering constitutes society and how society experiences itself through remembering.

While my dissertation has focused on specific modes of remembrance by looking at various literary, filmic, and memorial objects, its extension would turn to other areas of research in which we see how society emerges and gains an experience of itself through remembering and articulating modes of remembrance. A theme of this expansion would be how the commemorating of East German Communism also resulted in revisiting of the Nazi past.

Especially in literature and the creation of memorial sites, we have seen that the representation of both a totalitarian past and totalitarian thinking needs further investigation. Specific sites such as the *Gedenkstätte* Buchenwald, Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen, the Torgau Documentation and Information Center, or the memorial site Münchner Platz Dresden set out to account for a multidirectional historical complexity in a single commemorative space. All of these sites reveal competing recollections of the past that seek to be represented in memorial space.

The notion of competitive memory does not only apply to the memorialization of the GDR and the Third Reich. Competitive memory has become a necessity in a commemorative landscape that has limited resources and is highly dependent on federal and state government support and administration. Going beyond the dissertation, competitive memory could be studied most potently by looking at the contestations of grassroots. The notion of a historical witness, the *Zeitzeuge*, and the question of who is allowed to speak of and for the past are particularly compelling for the discussion of memory and its dynamic and contestational nature. As the temporal distance to Germany's authoritarian legacies grows, the authenticity of eyewitness statements will be less accessible. Not only are eyewitnesses, and especially victims, granted a special status in memorial representation, they also act as consultants, directly shaping cultural memory. Future research must pay careful attention to how cultural memory accommodates for the gradual disappearance of the eyewitness and the victim. It will have to revisit the questions of historical responsibility anew in various cultural objects in order to see how accepting and taking responsibility for the past shapes mnemonic practices.

Memory Studies will continue to play a pivotal role in describing the relationship between “what remains,” “what vanishes,” and “what re-appears” from the past in the present,

thereby questioning the assumption that the past can be *bewältigt* and left behind. With the decline of the nation state and the evolving of the European identity, memory and the dialects between continuity and discontinuity in relation to the past is no longer played out within single countries. Memory Studies has become indispensable in investigating how a larger collective, such as the European Union, imagines itself on the basis of a shared past.

Germany's commemorative landscape has already begun to envision a larger European collective. An important future field of research would be the exchange between various memorial sites in Europe through digital pathways. Memorial sites throughout Europe could establish digital links to each other, testifying to the imagining of a larger remembering community that shares experiences of the communist past. This research could help studying memory comparatively and would allow for the discerning of similarities and differences in mnemonic responses to present needs.

Thus, memory, as driving force for *Vergesellschaftung* on a larger (transnational) scale, could become crucial for studying the link between cultural memory and a shared European identity. Memory, with its open, dynamic, and discursive practices, can assure the pursuit of a European identity does not result in the merging of past differences. The cultural heritage of national or ethnic groups should not be eradicated or replaced by a homogenous notion of 'pastness.' Rather, this dissertation has shown that memory and mnemonic practices are fundamental in gaining a deeper understanding of the very idea of remembering as the realization of (individual, collective, social, cultural) belonging in the present.

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